

ŚRĪ GURU TATTVA VIJÑĀNA & ŚRĪ BHAKTA TATTVA VIJÑĀNA



two essays by

PAṆḌITA ŚRĪ ANANTA DĀSA BĀBĀJĪ MAHĀRĀJA

ŚRĪ GURU TATTVA VIJÑĀNA &
ŚRĪ BHAKTA TATTVA VIJÑĀNA

— *The Guru-principle & The Devotee-principle* —

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MESSAGE OF BLESSING

*Most beloved Śrīmān Amiya Gopāl dās and
Śubhaṅgadā dāsī have borne all printing expenses
for this book.*

*Śrīman Mādhavānanda dās and Mālatīlatā
dāsī have accomplished all matters concerning
printing of book, proof correction etc.*

Sudevī dāsī also helped in editing the text.

*I pray Śrī Śrī Rādhā Rāṇī's mercy be showered
upon them.*

*Well wisher,
Ananta Das*

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ŚRĪ GURU TATTVA VIJÑĀNA

— *The Guru-principle* —

*Offered to
the lotus hands
of the most worshipable
Śrī-Śrī Guru Mahārāja*

ŚRĪ GURU TATTVA VIJÑĀNA

THE PRINCIPLE OF ŚRĪ-ŚRĪ GURU

Svayaṁ Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa defined the principle of Śrī Gurudeva as follows to His dear devotee Śrī Uddhava (*Bhāg.* 11.17.27):

*ācāryaṁ mām vijānīyān nāvamanyeta karhicit
na martya-buddhyāsūyeta sarva devamayo guruḥ*

Śrī Bhagavān said: “O Uddhava! You should consider the *ācārya*, meaning *gurudeva*, to be I Myself, and never disrespect him. Do not find faults in him, taking him to be an ordinary human being, for Śrī Guru is the aggregate of all the gods.”

*guru kṛṣṇa rūpa hon śāstrera pramāṇe
guru rūpe kṛṣṇa kṛpā korena bhaktagaṇe
(Caitanya Caritāmṛta)*

“The *guru* is another form of Kṛṣṇa, that is proven by the scriptures. Kṛṣṇa bestows His mercy upon the devotees in the form of the *guru*.”

Through all this scriptural evidence, it can be known that Śrī Kṛṣṇa appears in this world in the form of the *guru* to extend His grace upon the devotees. This grace consists of the treasure of worshipping Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and the fruit of this *bhajana* is the treasure of *prema* which is bestowed upon the surrendered disciple. *Yo'ntar bahis tanu-bhṛtām aśubhaṁ vidhunvann ācārya-caitya vapuṣā svagatim vyanakti* (*Bhāg.* 11.29.6). Śrī Uddhava told Śrī Kṛṣṇa – “O Lord! You remove all the people's obstacles to *bhajana* in the form of sensual desires, granting them realisations about

You, externally in the form of Śrī Guru, who is giving instructions in spiritual truths, and internally in the form of the *antaryāmi* (the inner overseer) as good consciousness.” Therefore, formally, Śrī Gurudeva is as worshipable as Śrī Kṛṣṇa, but he is not the ultimate object of worship like Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The *guru* is the special devotee-manifestation of the Lord.

*yadyapi āmāra guru caitanyera dāsa
tathāpi jāniye āmi tāhāra prakāśa
(Caitanya Caritāmṛta)*

“Although my *guru* is the servant of Śrī Caitanya, still I know him to be the Lord’s manifestation.”

Śrī Gurudeva must be known as a special manifestation of the Lord in the form of a *mahā-bhāgavatottama* (topmost saint) – this is the true form of Śrī Guru. In his *Manaḥ Śikṣā*, Śrīla Raghunātha dāsa Gosvāmī has written: *śaci-sūnum nandīśvara pati sutatve guru-varaṁ mukunda preṣṭhatve smara param ajasraṁ nanu manaḥ* – “O mind! You should always remember Śaci-suta Śrī Gaurasundara as Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Śrī Gurudeva as Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s dearest devotee!” Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartīpāda has also written in his *Gurvaṣṭakam*:

*sākṣād dharitvena samasta śāstrair
uktas tathā bhāvyata eva sadbhiḥ
kintu prabhor yaḥ priya eva tasya
vande guroḥ śrī caraṇāravindam*

“All the scriptures proclaim Śrī Guru to be Lord Hari Himself, and the great saints also think like that, but he is also Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s dearest devotee – I offer my obeisances unto the lotus feet of that Śrī Gurudeva.”

The purport of this is that although Śrī Gurudeva is perceivable as Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s dearest devotee, the disciple considers him

to be the direct manifestation of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. If the disciple does not think like that, he might consider the *guru* to be an ordinary mortal being, and that will result into a great offence which will make all of his *sādhana-bhajana* fruitless, like the bath of an elephant.

THE NECESSITY OF TAKING SHELTER OF THE LOTUS FEET OF ŚRĪ GURU

One who wants to worship the Supreme Lord must first of all take shelter of the lotus feet of Śrī Guru. *Bhajana-sādhana* is far removed from one who does not take shelter of the lotus feet of Śrī Guru, because this is the gate through which one enters to the path of *bhakti*. This does not only count for the path of *bhakti*, there is no practice in the world that does not require the shelter of a *guru's* (teacher's) feet! If it is necessary to accept a learned and experienced teacher to learn something in this mundane world, then it is needless to say that one needs to take shelter of the feet of a guru to learn *bhakti*, which is the highest form of wisdom in the spiritual world. Another special feature of devotional knowledge is that the merciful Śrī Bhagavān has personally appeared within this world in the form of the Guru to teach *bhakti* to the people of the world.

We have briefly discussed the *guru*-principle above. When the gravity (*gurutva*) of the *guru*-principle is understood, then there will be no more doubts about the importance of taking shelter of the lotus feet of Śrī Guru. What is the intrinsic status of Śrī Guru, what is the nature of *guru* and what is the auspicious result of taking shelter of Śrī Guru's feet? An ignorant person has different doubts about these questions on taking shelter of Śrī Guru's feet. Knowledge on all these *guru*-principles is acquired in the association of the *sādhus*. Without the company

of the devotees of the Supreme Lord, the principle of *guru* cannot be understood. Hence the scriptures and the great saints first of all advise the people who wish to do *sādhana-bhajana*, and who desire the highest welfare, to associate with the saints. In *Śrīmad Bhāgavata*, Lord Śrī Kapiladeva has told His own mother Devahūti:

*satām prasāṅgān mama vīrya samvido
bhavanti hṛt karṇa rasāyanāḥ kathāḥ
taj joṣaṇād āśvapavarga vartmani
śraddhā ratir bhaktir anukramiṣyati
(Bhāgavata, 3.25.25)*

“When one attains the excellent company of the saints, topics that indicate My glories become like nectar for the heart and the ears. Anyone who lovingly relishes these topics, which are the swift pathway to the cessation of ignorance, will gradually develop faith, attachment and devotion for Me.”

The purport of this is that by hearing topics on the Supreme Lord from the great saints, one first attains faith, then one attains the shelter of a genuine *guru* and engages in *bhajana*, as a result of which *rati* and *prema* gradually develop. By the Lord's wish, the living beings have been wandering through different species of life since beginningless time and by the Lord's grace they have attained this human body, which is the gateway to liberation from the repetition of birth and death. The most fortunate amongst these human beings will attain the association of the saints. While hearing topics of Śrī Kṛṣṇa from the mouths of the greatly realised devotees of the Lord, the heart, which is polluted by attachment to sense objects, will be somewhat purified, and one will realise that the body and everything related to it is temporary, and the ocean of temporary material existence seems impossible to cross. Then, the heart will become eager to

cross the impassable and miserable ocean of material existence, which is filled with the crocodiles and sharks of lust and anger, to attain the eternally blissful lotus feet of the Lord and to find a suitable captain for the sturdy ship of the human body – Śrī Guru. In *Śrīmad Bhāgavata*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa has told Uddhava:

*nṛ deham ādyaṁ sulabham sudurlabham
 plavaṁ sukalpaṁ guru karṇa-dhāram
 mayānukūlena nabhasvateritaṁ pumān
 bhavābद्धim na taret sa ātma-hā
 (Śrīmad Bhāgavata, 11.20.17)*

“O Uddhava! This human body is the *ādya*, the root cause of all welfare, and *sukalpa*, expert in accomplishing its goal. The living entity attains this rarely attained human body, which is like an excellent boat with Śrī Gurudeva as its captain. On top of everything, I am providing favorable winds to steer it in the right direction. A person who does not endeavour to cross the ocean of material existence despite receiving this body is destroying himself.”

We have already discussed that in the company of the saints one comes to realise that one must take shelter of the feet of a *guru*. Thus we must understand that association with the *bhaktas* has not taken place if one has not realised the necessity of taking shelter of the feet of a *guru*. Wherever the association of the devotees is attained or is going on and there is no realisation about the obligation to take shelter of the lotus feet of Śrī Guru, or such shelter has not yet been taken, we must understand that the real association of saints has not taken place yet, or that due to some mischief the results of association with the saints are not yet tangible. As long as the shelter of Śrī Guru’s feet has not been attained, the fruit to be attained from the association of devotees is the taking shelter of the feet of Śrī Guru. It is so

because *bhajana* begins only after one receives *dīkṣa* (initiation) and *śikṣā* (instructions) from a genuine *guru*.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF A SAD-GURU

When a person wishes to be blessed with the fruits of *sādhana bhajana* and he desires to take shelter of the lotus feet of Śrī Guru, it is absolutely necessary that he takes shelter of the feet of a genuine *guru*. When the *guru*-potency awakens within a saint, he becomes known as a *sad-guru*. This *guru*-potency awakens within a saint in the following way: Those who have removed the dirt from their hearts through their practice of *sādhana-bhajana*, in whose hearts *bhakti* has awakened and who have become ornamented by saintly qualities such as compassion and kindness, their hearts melt when they see the misery the conditioned souls experience in the material world of *māyā*. By instructing the conditioned souls in the practice of *bhajana*, they destroy their miserable condition and they are eager to bless them by giving them the relish of *bhakti-rasa*. By the Lord's wish, the *guru*-potency emanates from Him and appears within the hearts of such *bhakti-siddha-mahāpuruṣas* (His pure devotees). A person who covets devotion to the Supreme Lord is blessed by taking shelter of such a qualified and genuine *guru*. The characteristics of such a genuine *guru* have been described in *Śrīmad Bhāgavata* (II.3.21):

*tasmād gurum prapadyeta jijñāsuḥ śreyah uttamam
śābde pare ca niṣṇātaṁ brahmaṇyupaśamāśrayam*

“Therefore a person who inquires about the highest welfare should take shelter of the lotus feet of a genuine *guru*, who is *śabdabrahma* and *parabrahma-niṣṇāta*, and *upaśamāśraya*, or free from lust and greed.”

Śrīdhara Svāmī writes in his commentary on this verse: *śābde brahmaṇi vedākhya nyāyato niṣṇātaṁ tattvajñam. anyathā saṁśaya nirāśakatvāyogāt. pare ca brahmaṇi aparokṣānubhavaṇa niṣṇātaṁ. anyathā bodha sañcārāyogāt. para brahma niṣṇātatva dyotakam āha upaśamāśrayam iti*—“That the genuine *guru* is *śabdabrahma-niṣṇāta* means that he is a knower of the Vedic literature and a knower of the truth. If he is not, then he cannot remove the doubts of the disciples who take shelter of him. Then again he is *parabrahma-niṣṇāta*, which means that He is a devotee, or that He is endowed with transcendental realisations about Śrī Kṛṣṇa. If he is not, then he cannot infuse realisations on *bhajana* within the heart of his disciple.”

One may ask here: “We may be able to see that the *guru* is *śabdabrahma-niṣṇāta* by seeing and hearing his scriptural knowledge, but how will we know if he is *parabrahma-niṣṇāta*, or filled with transcendental realisations about Śrī Kṛṣṇa?” The answer to this is that he should be *upaśamāśraya*, or devoid of lust, anger and greed. The heart of anyone who is enlightened by *bhakti* cannot be covered by the darkness of lust and greed and so on. Therefore the definitions of a genuine *guru* given by the *śāstras* are as follows:

1) He is filled with realisations about the Personality of Godhead due to his firm faith and his firm adherence to the *bhajana* of the Lord. He has attained the grace of his own *guru* by being similarly devoted to his *guru's* lotus feet.

2) He is very learned in the Vedas and in *bhakti*-scriptures that outline the meaning of the Vedas, such as *Śrīmad Bhāgavata*. Thus he can destroy the doubts in his disciples.

3) Because he has transcendental realisations about Śrī Kṛṣṇa, he has attained His mercy-potency. Thus he has become so powerful that he is able to bring the disciple onto the path of *bhakti* and infuse this power within him.

4) He is not overcome by vices like lust and greed.

A saint who is endowed with such attributes and who is filled with parental love for his disciples can attain the position of a genuine *guru*. Such a genuine *guru* is able to destroy different obstacles the disciple may find in his *bhajana*, bless him with *prema* and bring him to the lotus feet of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. On the other hand, a person who desires to be known as a *guru* may have many virtues, like high birth and so on, but if he does not have the abovementioned characteristics, he will not be counted amongst the genuine *gurus*. Therefore a faithful person who is eager to do Śrī Kṛṣṇa-*bhajana* should take shelter of the lotus feet of a *mahāpuruṣa* who is endowed with the right qualities, receive initiation into Śrī Kṛṣṇa-*mantra* from him and learn *bhajana* from him.

THE GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF A SAD-GURU

He is learned in the Vedas, has realisations about Śrī Kṛṣṇa, is most peaceful, surrendered in Śrī Kṛṣṇa-*bhakti*, understands Śrī Kṛṣṇa's glories such as His being the benefactor of His devotees, has offered his heart to Śrī Kṛṣṇa, has a pure body (is free from disease or invalidity), has defeated the six enemies headed by lust, is deeply attached to Śrī Kṛṣṇa through his devotion, knows the immaculate path of the Vedic literatures, is approved of by the *sādhus*, has control over his senses and is in constant transcendental consciousness (*brahma-niṣṭha*). (*Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, 1.32-35)

THE SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF A SAD-GURU

A *guru* who is born in a faultless and sinless family, is himself sinless and faultless, behaves as he should do, belongs to a

certain *āśrama*, is free from anger, knows the Vedas and all other scriptures, has faith, does not find faults, speaks affectionately, is nice to behold, pure, nicely dressed, young, engaged in the welfare of all living entities, intelligent, prideless, satisfied, non-violent, able to judge transcendental truths, endowed with parental love, expert in *pūjā* of the Supreme Lord, grateful, affectionate towards his disciples, able to punish and reward, practising *homa-mantra*, a knower of all kinds of arguments and counter-arguments, pure-hearted and merciful, is an ocean of glories. (*Hari-bhakti-vilāsa*, 1.38-41)

THE SPECIALITY OF THE GURU'S GRACE

There is a slight difference between Śrī Hari's grace and Śrī Guru's grace. In the *Upaniṣads* it is described that "A person to whom Śrī Hari wishes to cast a low glance will engage in evil acts, and the demons will receive contrary instructions." However, the *ācārya* wants to elevate everyone and engage everyone in saintly activities. He always speaks the right words everywhere. Therefore the grace of the *guru* is coveted:

*sāstroktam dharmam uccārya svayam ācarate sadā
anyebhyaḥ śikṣayed yas tu sa ācāryo nigadyate*

"He who always presents the scriptural injunctions, who follows them himself, and also teaches others to act accordingly, is called an *ācārya*."

THE MEANS TO ATTAIN A GENUINE GURU

Some people think that a genuine *guru* is very rare in this world and it is not easy to recognise and attain a genuine *guru*. Thinking like this, they do not endeavour to take *dīkṣā-mantra* and

thus waste the precious moments of their rare human lives. In this connection it must be said that when the Lord descends as the genuine *guru* for the benefit of the world, He is never hard to attain or unattainable for the genuine seekers of *bhajana* and those who are eager to take shelter of the genuine *guru*. Those, who give up crookedness and associate with saints with a simple and innocent mind for the cessation of their material miseries, earnestly taking shelter of the feet of a genuine *guru* for the sake of worshipping the Lord, praying to the Lord with an eager heart while hoping to attain the genuine *guru*, will certainly be blessed with the shelter of a genuine *guru* – of this there is not even the slightest doubt. Merciful Śrī Hari will certainly provide good fortune and opportunities to such persons, who are so eager to do *bhajana*.

SHELTER OF THE FEET OF ŚRĪ GURU

The first three of the 64 items of *bhajana* that are described by Śrīmat Rūpa Gosvāmīpāda are *guru padāśrayas tasmāt kṛṣṇa dīkṣādi śikṣaṇam viśrambheṇa guroḥ sevā* (*Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, 1.2.74): 1) Taking shelter of Śrī Guru's feet; 2) Taking initiation into Śrī Kṛṣṇa-*mantra* and learning Bhāgavata-*dharma* (the religion of worshipping the Personality of Godhead) from him; 3) Serving Śrī Guru with faith. *Guru-padāśraya, dīkṣā, gurura sevana* (*Caitanya Caritāmṛta*).

Guru-padāśraya means that a person who wishes to do *bhagavad-bhajana* must live near Śrī Guru's feet for a while before taking initiation, and sincerely render service to him according to his wishes, so that the lotus feet of Śrī Guru are pleased. In the scriptures, a mutual examination of *guru* and disciple is also described as necessary. In this way both *guru* and disciple can examine each other's natures and qualifications. If this is not done,

then they may both experience obstacles in their *bhajana* in the future. In other words, if the *guru* does not have the characteristics that are described in the *śāstras*, the disciple will inevitably experience obstacles in *bhajana*, and if the disciple is not qualified, then the *guru* will inevitably experience obstacles in *bhajana*. Not only that, this also has a very valuable result. When the *sādhaka* who is eager to receive *dīkṣā* stays for a few days with the *guru* and engages in his service, he will also become qualified for both *dīkṣā* and *bhajana*. On the other hand, the *śrī-guru-tattva* will melt with compassion when he sees the sincere service rendered to such a *mahā-bhāgavata*. The practising devotee fulfills a main human pursuit by attaining the *dīkṣā-mantra* from the lotus feet of Śrī Guru, whose heart is melting of compassion, being satisfied with his service. In this way the practising devotee will be blessed with the true relish of ambrosial *bhakti-rasa*. Here it is noteworthy that a *mahāpuruṣa*, who is endowed with extraordinary powers, can examine the qualifications of a disciple on mere sight, or can make an unqualified candidate at once qualified and can thus give initiation to a candidate at once. For such great persons there is no bondage to the above rules and regulations. This, however, does not apply to all ordinary persons.

INITIATION

What is meant with *dīkṣā*, or initiation? In his *Bhakti Sandarbha* (283), Śrīmat Jīva Gosvāmīpāda quotes the *śāstras* to describe the glories of initiation:

*divyaṁ jñānaṁ yato dadyāt kuryāt pāpasya saṅkṣayam
tasmād dīkṣeti sā proktā deśikais tattva kovidaiḥ*

“That which bestows divine knowledge and destroys all sins is called *dīkṣā* by the *ācāryas* who know the truth.”

Śrī Jivapāda adds: *divyaṁ jñānaṁ hyatra śrīmatī mantre bhagavat svarūpa jñānaṁ tena bhagavatā sambandha viśeṣa jñānaṁ ca* – “Here divine knowledge means the knowledge about the Lord’s intrinsic identity which lies within the *mantra*, along with specific knowledge of the living being’s relationship with the Lord.”

*jīvera svarūpa hoy – kṛṣṇera nitya dāsa
kṛṣṇera tatasthā śakti – bhedābheda prakāśa
(Caitanya Caritāmṛta)*

“The intrinsic identity of the living entity is that he is Kṛṣṇa’s eternal servant. Being Kṛṣṇa’s marginal potency he is both different and nondifferent from Him.”

Although the living being is Kṛṣṇa’s eternal servant, he has been averse to the Lord since beginningless time. Hence he has been swallowed by ignorance and illusion, and being under such illusion, he identifies with his false body, senses and mind. Forgetting his own intrinsic identity he calls his false body “I”, and forgetting his eternal relationship with Śrī Hari, he becomes bound to his wife, children and money.

*kṛṣṇa nitya dāsa jīva tāhā bhuli gelo
sei doṣe māyā tāra golāya bāndhilo
(Caitanya Caritāmṛta)*

“The living being has forgotten that he is Kṛṣṇa’s eternal servant, and due to that fault *māyā* has bound him around the neck.”

In this way, although the living being is intrinsically a transcendental entity, he is bound by *māyā* and wanders around in the miserable material world, reincarnating from one painful species of life to the other. Śrī Guru mercifully slackens the bondage of *māyā* and infuses the spiritual energy of *bhakti* into the disciple’s heart, thus awakening his eternal and special relationship with Śrī Hari – this is called *dīkṣā*.

Then again the *mantra* is the intrinsic form of the Lord, and by the grace of the *sādhus* and the *guru*, who are Śrī Hari's *kāruṇya-ghana-vigraha*, the embodiments of His deep mercy, the Lord enters into the disciple's heart in the form of the *mantra* to make his body, mind and life-air transcendentally suitable for serving the Lord. Śrīman Mahāprabhu Himself said:

dīkṣā kāle bhakta kore ātma samarpaṇa
sei kāle kṛṣṇa tāte kore ātma sama
sei deha korena tāra cid-ānandamoy
aprākṛta dehe tāra caraṇa bhajoy
(Caitanya Caritāmṛta)

“At the time of initiation the devotee surrenders himself and at that time Kṛṣṇa makes the practising devotee equal to Himself. The Lord then makes the devotee's body transcendental and in this transcendental body he can worship the Lord's lotus feet.”

It is easily understandable that those who know these glories of taking shelter of the lotus feet of a genuine *guru* and taking initiation, but still think that it is not necessary to take initiation and that chanting the holy name alone will suffice, will find so many obstacles and defeats on their spiritual paths. In truth, this is not endorsed by the Gosvāmīs. The *śāstras* and the sayings of the *mahājānas* have shown the glories and the eternality of taking initiation, and from the ancient *mahājānas* down to the present day *sādhaka-samāja* (society of practising devotees) such purificatory rites have always existed. If someone knows this, but is still averse to taking shelter of the lotus feet of a genuine *guru*, it will result in an offence to the chanting of the holy name. It is not only an offence to the scriptures and the sayings of the *mahājānas*, but it is also a sign of disrespect to the *guru*-principle – these two powerful offenses will be committed.

DĪKṢĀ-MANTRA

Of all the different *mantras* that have been mentioned by the *śāstras* in connection with *dīkṣā*, the Śrī Kṛṣṇa-*mantra* is the most important, because Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the Original Personality of Godhead, the origin of all Personalities of Godhead. Of the three playgrounds of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Vṛndāvana, Mathurā and Dvārakā, the greatest attribute of Godhead, sweetness, is manifest in Śrī Vṛndāvana, where Śrī Kṛṣṇa plays like a cowherd boy. Therefore the *mantras* in connection with this Vṛndāvana-*līlā* are the greatest. Then again the 10-syllable and 18-syllable Gopījana-vallabha *mantras*, which induce the topmost *madhura rasa-līlā*, are the greatest of all. Although these *mantras* have all been written down in sacred books and publications, their *japa* will yield no fruit, as the *mantra* must be received from a *sad-guru*.

Some people also consider the 16-word, 32-syllable *hare kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra* as a *dīkṣā-mantra*, but this *harināma mahā-mantra* has not been counted amongst the *dīkṣā-mantras* in any of the initiation manuals because if it is chanted out loud, how can it be counted amongst the *dīkṣā-mantras*? At some places this *harināma* is being given in advance of the *dīkṣā* to purify the ears and the heart, but this is not called *dīkṣā*. The question may be raised: When the *hare kṛṣṇa mantra* is called the *mahā-mantra*, then will not perfection be attained by taking this *mantra* alone? The answer to this is that the *hare kṛṣṇa mantra* is called the *mahā-mantra* because it is more powerful than any other *mantra* in bestowing *prema*. Still, if there is no fourth case ending (*sampradāna*, dative case) and the *ṛsyādi ṣaḍaṅga* (six standard sequences that form a certain pattern of composition) are not there, it is not a *dīkṣā-mantra*. One should know that before accepting *dīkṣā*, the fruit of *harināma-saṅkīrtana*

will be the taking of the shelter of the genuine *guru* and his instructions on *dīkṣā*, and after taking *dīkṣā* the fruit of *nama saṅkīrtana* will be *prema*.

DĪKṢĀ-GURU AND ŚIKṢĀ-GURU

The giver of the *mantra* is called the *dīkṣā-guru* and the giver of instructions on *bhajana* is the *śikṣā-guru*. *Śrīmad Bhāgavata* says: *labdhānugraha ācāryāt tena sa darśitāgamah* – “Taking the *mantra* from the Guru, one must receive the rules concerning the *mantras* and knowledge of the *sāstras* from him (*tena*).” If that is so, then it is understood that those whose duty it is to give *dīkṣā* must also give teachings concerning the rules of practising these *mantras*. The aim of the *sāstras* is that one should take shelter of the lotus feet of a *guru*, therefore if one thinks that the genuine *guru* is not able to give instructions on how to perform *bhajana* one becomes stained with the offence of diminishing the *guru*’s dignity. However, if the *dīkṣā-guru* passes away before the disciple was able to receive instructions on *bhajana* from him, then one should accept a similar great saint, who is expert in *bhajana*, as a *śikṣā-guru* in the matters of *bhajana*, and serve and attend him like he is Śrī Guru himself. The *guru* from whom one takes shelter in the life of *bhajana* to learn *bhajana* is called a *śikṣā-guru*. To bestow *bhakti* upon the conditioned souls and to take them to Him, merciful Śrī Kṛṣṇa has appeared internally as the *antaryāmi śikṣā-guru* (the inner overseer) and externally as the *ācārya*, who is the topmost *bhakta*. In *Śrī Caitanya Caritāmṛta* it is described:

*śikṣā guru to jāni kṛṣṇera svarūpa
antaryāmi bhakta śreṣṭha ei dui rūpa*

“I know the *śikṣā-guru* to be a form of Kṛṣṇa, who appears in two forms – the inner overseer and the topmost devotee.”

From these words it is learned that of the two, the *antaryāmi* and the topmost devotee, He who teaches as the *antaryāmi* is not perceivable. He is called the *caitya-guru*, the teacher in the heart. He, who regulates the conditioned souls and gives them intelligence to act as the Paramātmā, is not the regulator of the *bhakta's* heart. Therefore He does not teach the devotee as the *caitya-guru*. The form of the Lord that is worshipped within the heart of the devotee appears within the heart of the devotee as the *antaryāmi* and teaches and engages him in the ways of loving Him in his own particular mood. And yet again, the topmost devotee who externally teaches the disciple *bhajana* in a tangible form, is also Śrī Kṛṣṇa as such.

Some are preaching a philosophy which is not in any scripture, saying that one must take a *śikṣā-mantra* from the *śikṣā-guru*. However, there is no such a thing as a *śikṣā-mantra* mentioned in the *śāstras* or by the *mahājanas*. Let no one, therefore, be deceived by such an errant, un-scriptural theory.

THE SERVICE OF ŚRĪ GURU

It is not that the duties of the disciple end after he has taken *dīkṣā* from the genuine Guru. There is a special need to serve Śrī Gurudeva after taking initiation, because the satisfaction of Śrī Gurudeva is the root cause of the satisfaction of the Lord and the destruction of all obstacles in *bhajana* for the *sādhaka*. Śrīmat Jīva Gosvāmīpāda has written in his *Bhakti Sandarbha: tat prasādo hi sva sva nānā pratikāra dustyajānārtha-hānau bhagavat parama prasāda siddhau ca mūlam* – “The unwanted habits that are very hard to give up through one’s various own endeavours can be destroyed if the Guru is pleased with the

disciple, and Lord Śrī Hari will also be most pleased when the disciple pleases Śrī Guru." The purport of these words of Śrīla Gosvāmīpāda is that when the practising devotee begins to make headway on the path of *bhajana*, then all kinds of powerful bad habits, cultivated in previous lives or in this life, stick up their ugly heads and disturb his *sādhana-bhajana*. Nevertheless, the *sādhaka* will not be able to transcend these bad habits on his own, although he may try to do that by various means. The only way to destroy these bad habits is to please Śrī Guru.

Also, the only way to please the Lord is to please Śrī Guru. From this, it is understood that the root cause of *bhajana-sādhana* and the attainment of its fruit, the destruction of all kinds of bad habits and the attainment of the Lord with *prema*, is the satisfaction of Śrī Guru – through the sincere service of Śrī Gurudeva. From *Śrīmad Bhāgavata* it is also learned that all bad habits are destroyed by serving Śrī Guru with devotion:

*asaṅkalpājjayet kāmam krodham kāma vivarjanāt
arthānarthekṣayā lobham bhayam tattvāvamarsanāt
ānvīkṣikyā śoka mohau dambham mahad upāsāyā
yogāntarāyān maunena himsām kāmādyanihayā
krpayā bhūtajam duḥkam daivam jahyāt samādhinā
ātmajam yoga-vīryeṇa nidrām sattva niṣevayā
rajas tamaśca sattvena sattvam copāsamena ca
etat sarvaṁ gurau bhaktyā puruṣo hyaṅjasā jayet
(Śrīmad Bhāgavata, 7.15.22-25)*

Śrī Nārada told King Yudhiṣṭhira: "O King! To give up lust one must give up one's determination to enjoy, to give up anger one must give up lust, because when lust is frustrated, anger arises, and to give up greed one must see the evil of money and all things it can buy. Fear can be given up by constantly considering the truth, lamentation and illusion can be given up by

considering what is material and what is spiritual, and pride can be given up by serving a great soul. When a vow of silence reaches perfection and all other topics but Kṛṣṇa-*kathā* are given up, the mind becomes fixed. Violence is conquered by giving up endeavours for sense-gratification, suffering caused by other living entities can be mitigated by developing the quality of compassion, suffering caused by the elements can be mitigated by entering into *samādhi* and suffering caused by the own body and mind can be mitigated by practising the eight-fold path of mystic *yoga* (*aṣṭāṅga-yoga*). When the mode of goodness increases, sleep is conquered, along with the modes of passion and ignorance. In this way one practice destroys one bad habit, but the *sādhaka* can conquer all these vices and obstacles together simply by being devoted to the *guru*.”

In these words of *Śrīmad Bhāgavata* we can see how special is the gravity of *guru-sevā* if we want to give up all bad habits.

SPECIAL GURU-SEVĀ

In Bhakti Sandarbha Śrīmat Jīva Gosvāmīpāda has written: *tatra yadyapi śaraṇāpattyaiva sarvaṁ siddhyati . . . tathāpi vaiśiṣṭhya lipsuḥ śaktaścet tataḥ bhagavacchastropadeṣṭṛṇām vā śrī guru-caraṇānām nityam eva viśeṣataḥ sevām kuryāt* – “Although the *sādhaka* achieves all perfection by surrendering to the Lord’s lotus feet, still if a person wants to attain special perfection, then he must always specially serve the *guru* who instructs him in the scriptures as well as the *guru* who initiated him into the Lord’s *mantras*.”

Śrīla Gosvāmīpāda uses the word *viśeṣataḥ* (specially) in the phrase *viśeṣataḥ sevām kuryāt* to hint at special service to the *guru*. Special service means also an ordinary service. After taking initiation, the *sādhaka* always engages in the worship of Śrī

Hari by hearing, chanting, worshipping the deities and praising the Lord. This also includes the formal worship and praises, etc. of Śrī Guru. Therefore, wherever the chief items of *bhajana* are hearing and chanting the glories of the Lord, the worship and praise of Śrī Guru is incorporated as a secondary item. That is called ordinary service to the *guru*. By worshipping the *guru* as an aspect of one's worship of the Supreme Lord, the *sādhaka* attains the fruit of *prema*. It is a rule in the kingdom of *sādhana* that worship of the Lord will be successful when it is endowed with sincere *guru-bhakti*.

Then again, if a person is exclusively surrendered to *guru-bhakti* and fixed in *guru-sevā*, and keeps the worship and service of Śrī Guru as the main item, while practising hearing and chanting about the Lord as a auxiliary item of his *bhajana*, it is called special *guru-sevā*. Then the service of the *guru* is the priority, or the *aṅgī*, and the hearing and chanting of the Supreme Lord is secondary, or the *aṅga*. This kind of *sādhaka*, who is especially fixed in his service to the *guru*, is called *vaiṣiṣṭya lipsu* by Śrīmat Jīva Gosvāmīpāda. The Lord showers such a *sādhaka*, who is exclusively fixed in the service of his *guru*, with even more mercy (than a person who worships Him personally). In *Śrī Padma Purāṇa*, in the *Śrī Devahūti-stava*, it is seen:

*bhaktir yathā harau me'sti tad varīṣṭhā gurau yadi
mamāsti tena satyena sandarśayatu me hariḥ*

"If I have more devotion for the *guru* than for Śrī Hari Himself, then because of this truth He will surely reveal Himself to me."

When Śrī Guru is pleased, Śrī Hari is naturally pleased. In *Śrī Vāmana Kalpa* it is seen:

*yo mantraḥ sa guruḥ sākṣāt yo guruḥ sa hariḥ svayam
gurur yasya bhavet tuṣṭas tasya tuṣṭo hariḥ svayam*

"The *mantra* is nondifferent from the Guru and the Guru is nondifferent from Śrī Hari. When the Guru is pleased with someone, Śrī Hari will also automatically be pleased with that person."

THINGS TO BEWARE OF WHILE SERVING ŚRĪ GURU

The *sādhaka* should be specially careful when serving Śrī Guru, who is endowed with such great glories. Śrīla Ṭhākura Mahāśaya has said: *śrī guru caraṇa padma, kevala bhakati sadma, bandoṇ mui sāvadhāna mane* – "The lotus feet of Śrī Guru are the abode of pure devotion. I bow down to them with great care." When the principle of Śrī Guru is in any way considered an ordinary human being, the *nāmāparādha* of *guruavajña*, disrespect for the *guru*, comes into being and will deprive the *sādhaka* of the great fruits of *guru-sevā*. One should beware of the following things:

One should never contravene the words of Śrī Guru. One should never violate the *guru's* shoes, garments, bathing water, bed and other utilities. Do not pronounce Śrī Guru's name in a casual way. When there is a certain necessity, bow down, fold the hands and pronounce different reverential titles of the *guru* such as "*aṣṭottara śata śrī-śrī*", "*om viṣṇupāda*", "*prabhupāda*" and so on, before pronouncing his actual name. Never imitate the gait, speech, voice or gestures of the *guru*. Do not spread the legs, place one leg over the other thigh before the *guru* or point the feet at the *guru*. Do not yawn, laugh loudly, spread out the fingers, sway the body or make one's hands and feet or any other limb dance in front of the *guru*. When coming to the *guru*, do not sit down without his prior permission, but stand before him with folded hands. Do not lie down on a bed in front of Śrī Guru. When staying in the presence of the *guru*,

never go anywhere without his permission. Do not worship or praise anyone else in front of the *guru*. Do not explain the *śāstras* in front of the *guru* and do not give initiation without the permission of the *guru*. Do not control others in front of Śrī Guru and do not chastise others in front of Śrī Guru. Do not say anything to the *guru* that sounds like an order, do not make any gestures or hints in front of him, like flapping the hands or winking with the eyes. The rebukes and chastisements of the *guru* must always be tolerated and must never be responded by hatred, ill will or envy. Never take anything from Śrī Guru without telling him. It is also a cause of offence to remain silent in front of the *guru*, not to praise him or not to ask him any questions about *bhajana*. Even if the disciple has taken a *mauna-vrata* (vow of silence), he should not remain silent in front of the *guru*.

Do not go to any place where someone is so envious that he slanders Śrī Gurudeva or tries to diminish his glories. If by chance one hears blasphemy of the *guru*, one should block the ears, remember Śrī Hari and leave that place. It is forbidden to associate with a person who blasphemes the *guru*, to live with such a person or even to see such a person's face. When one sees Śrī Gurudeva arriving, one must come forward and offer *sāṣṭāṅga daṇḍavat* (prostrated obeisances, also within the mind), and when he leaves, one must walk behind him.

One must personally bring the water for washing Śrī Guru's feet and for bathing him, and one must personally massage Śrī Gurudeva's body, bathe him, anoint him with unguents like sandalwood pulp, wash his clothes and massage his feet. One must personally clean and anoint Śrī Gurudeva's house or room, and his yard. One must take *bhagavat-prasāda* only after offering it to Śrī Gurudeva. One must always please Śrī Gurudeva in a simple and loving manner, with a saintly heart, with body,

mind and words, and with one's house, wealth and one's very life. A *sādhaka* who follows these rules and prohibitions in connection with Śrī Guru will swiftly attain the ultimate result of Śrī Guru-sevā in the form of loving devotion to the Lord's lotus feet and thus become blessed and fulfilled.

SOME THINGS THAT SHOULD BE ESPECIALLY NOTED

In his book *Siddhānta Ratna*, Śrīpāda Baladeva Vidyābhūṣaṇa has written: *eṣā tu bhaktis tan nitya parikaragaṇād ārabhyedānīntaneṣvapi tad bhakteṣu mandākinīva pracarati . . . sātathābhūtā nitya dhāmni nitya pārsadeṣu nityam cakāsti surasaridīva tad bhakta praṇālyā prapañce'vatarati* – "This *bhakti* is being promulgated from the eternal associates of Śrī Hari down to the present day *sādhaka-bhaktas* like the current of the Mandākinī-river (the celestial Gaṅgā). *Bhakti* is always present within the Lord's eternal associates within the eternal abode, and flows down to the mundane world through the drain of Śrī Hari's devotees like the stream of the Mandākinī." The purport of this is that just as the current of the Mandākinī-river flows down from the Lord's lotus feet to purify the three worlds – heaven, earth and hell – similarly *bhakti*, which is the essential faculty of Śrī Hari's transcendental intrinsic potency, flows down from Śrī Kṛṣṇa through the *bhakta-praṇālikā* (the devotee-drain, or *guru-praṇālikā*, the succession of Gurus) to reach the hearts of all the devotees in the world. The *sādhaka* attains this Śrī *guru-praṇāli* from the *sad-guru*.

In the present particular age of Kali, Śrīman Mahāprabhu is mercifully bestowing devotion impregnated with the sublime amorous *rasa* of Vraja, *mañjarī-bhāva-sādhana*, to the people of the world. Those who wish to become blessed by commencing this *mañjarī-bhāva-sādhana*, which is the

unprecedented merciful gift of Śrīman Mahāprabhu, should take shelter of the lotus feet of such a Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *guru* and receive the *śrī guru-praṇālī* and *siddha-praṇālī* from him, as a basis for doing *bhajāna*.

As a result of Śrī Guru *sevā* and *guru-bhakti*, the *sādhaka* will easily be able to conquer all of his bad habits and become blessed; this we have already mentioned before. Śrī Hari's grace descends to the world in two streams – one is Śrī Vaiṣṇava and the other Śrī Guru. Through the glorious association of the Vaiṣṇavas, one learns about the obligation to take shelter of the lotus feet of Śrī Guru, and by the grace of the Vaiṣṇavas one actually attains shelter at the lotus feet of a genuine *guru*. By the grace of the Vaiṣṇavas, we attain the priceless treasure of Śrī Guru, who is the root cause of *bhagavad-bhajāna*. Therefore, the *sādhakas* who desire to attain *prema* should equally serve Śrī Guru and Śrī Vaiṣṇava. When the grace of the Vaiṣṇava, who is the *bhagavad-bhaktimaya vighraha*, the full embodiment of devotion to God, and Śrī Guru, who is *bhagavad-bhaktimaya vighraha sāksāt bhagavad-avatāra*, not only the full embodiment of devotion to God, but a direct incarnation of the Lord as well, meet each other, the *bhakti-sāadhanā* of the *sādhaka* will reach fulfilment. Hence Śrīla Narottama Ṭhākura Mahāśaya has written:

*chāḍiyā vaiṣṇava sevā, nistāra peyeche keṇā,
anuṣṇa kheda uṭhe mane
narottama dāse koy, jīvāra ucita noy
śrī guru vaiṣṇava sevā vine*

“Who was ever redeemed without serving the Vaiṣṇavas? This grief constantly rises within my mind. Narottama dāsa says: ‘Life is not worth living without serving Śrī Guru and the Vaiṣṇavas.’”

Śrī Bhagavān's grace descends in two forms – Śrī Guru and Śrī Vaiṣṇava. Service toward Guru and Vaiṣṇava are both direct service to the Lord's grace. If one is not there, the other remains incomplete. If *guru* is served but there is no eagerness to serve the Vaiṣṇava, then the service of *guru* is not complete; and when the Vaiṣṇavas are served, but there is no eagerness to serve the *guru*, then there is also no full service to the Vaiṣṇavas. Therefore the genuine *guru* offers his surrendered disciple at the feet of the Śrī Vaiṣṇavas and orders him to be blessed with the association and the service of the Vaiṣṇavas, and the genuine Vaiṣṇava also orders the devotee who surrenders unto him to become blessed by engaging in the service of Śrī Guru's lotus feet.

If the *guru* is so envious that he forbids his disciple to associate with a *mahā-bhāgavata* Vaiṣṇava or to engage in his service, then the disciple should think that Śrī Gurudeva is testing his devotion to the Vaiṣṇavas, and should surrender to the lotus feet of Śrī Guru, anxiously praying to him to revoke that order. If the *guru* nevertheless continues to give this order, then the disciple should consider this his own bad luck and worship this *guru* from a distance, taking shelter of the Lord's lotus feet. However, he should not abandon such a *guru* or act in an unfavorable way towards him. If the *guru* becomes openly hostile towards the Vaiṣṇavas, then such a *guru* must be given up, knowing him to be an *avaiṣṇava*, and one must take shelter of the lotus feet of a Vaiṣṇava *guru* again according to the rules. Śrīmat Jīva Gosvāmīpāda has outlined this very clearly in his *Śrī Bhakti Sandarbha*:

*yo vyakti nyāya rahitam anyāyena śṛṇoti yaḥ
tāv ubhau narakam ghoram vrajataḥ kālam akṣayam
iti nārada pañcarātre. ataeva dūrata evārādhyas tādṛśo guruḥ
vaiṣṇava-vidveṣi cet parityajya eva -*

*guror apyavalīptasya kāryākāryam ajānataḥ
 utpatha pratipannasya parityāgo vidhiyate
 iti smaraṇāt tasya vaiṣṇava bhāva rāhityenāvaiṣṇavatayā
 'avaiṣṇavopadiṣṭenaḥ' ityādi vacana viśayācca.*

(Bhakti Sandarbha, 238)

“A person who speaks contrary to the morals enunciated by the Vaiṣṇava-*śāstras*, and the person who hears such immoral teachings, will both live in a foul hell for eternity.” If an instruction of Śrī Gurudeva is contrary to the *śāstras*, then the association of such a *guru* should be given up and he should be worshipped from a distance. If the *guru* is an enemy of the Vaiṣṇavas, it is most auspicious to give him up altogether. The word *dveṣa* (hatred) also stands for *ninda* (slander) – *nindāpi dveṣa samāḥ* (*Bhakti Sandarbha*). This *vaiṣṇava-vidveṣa*, or slander, should be known to include the six kinds of *vaiṣṇavāparādha*. Therefore, an offender to the Vaiṣṇavas is not qualified to be a *guru*, and he must be abandoned. A *guru* who is attached to sense gratification, who does not know what is to be done and what is not to be done, and who has departed from the proper path (by acting contrary to the *bhakti-śāstras*) must be abandoned. He has no Vaiṣṇava-feelings, therefore he is an *avaiṣṇava* (non-devotee). The scriptural saying “a *mantra* received from an *avaiṣṇava* will drag one to hell” also shows that an *avaiṣṇava guru* is to be abandoned.

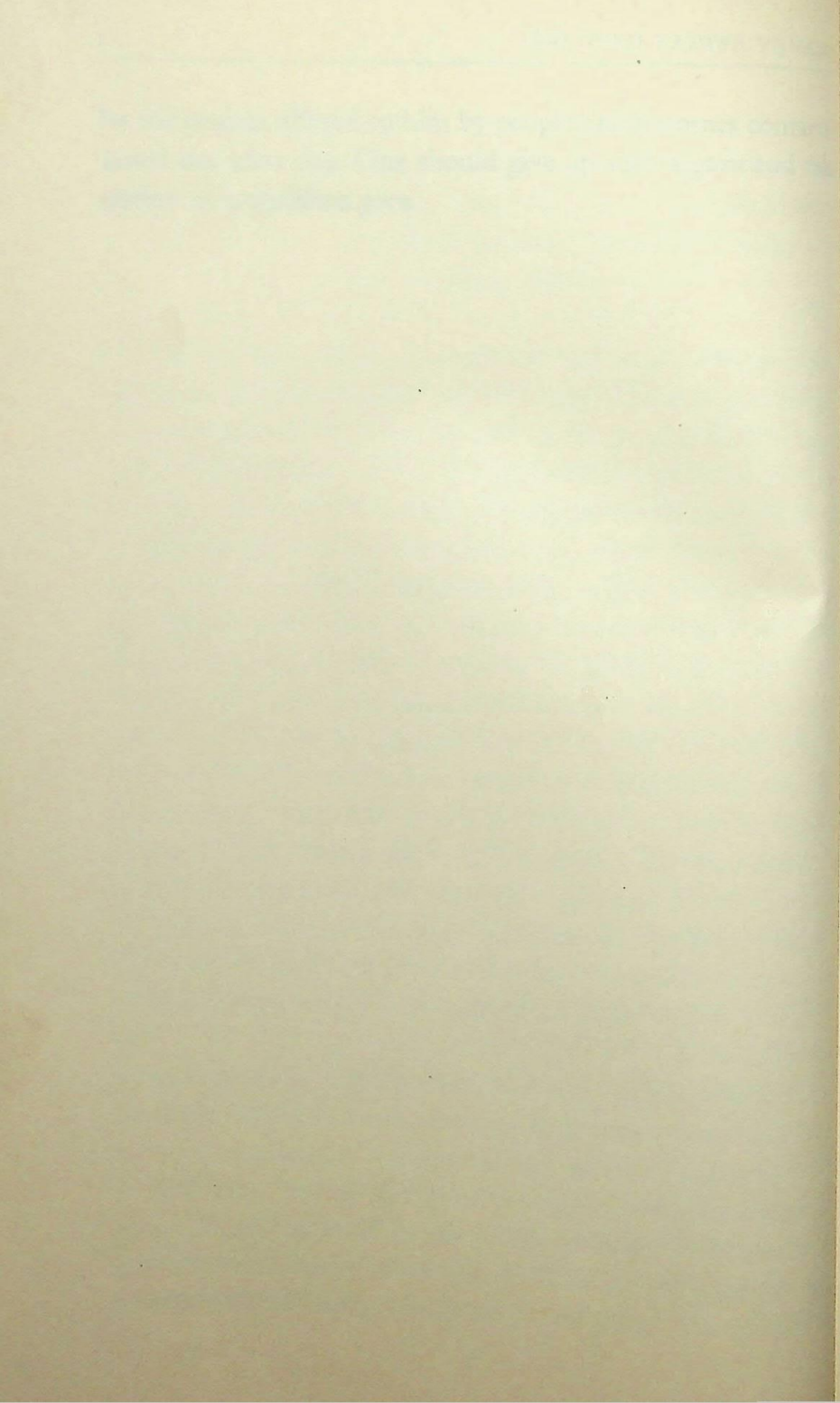
The following things must also be considered about the *guru* who is to be abandoned: If a *guru* performs sinful or reproachable activities, meaning that he hates the Vaiṣṇavas or does not act like a Vaiṣṇava, or that he proclaims himself to be God, or is averse to hearing and chanting the topics of Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s deeds, not experiencing the bliss arising from hearing and chanting Śrī Kṛṣṇa-*līlā*. Again, out of false pride he becomes intoxicated

by the praises offered to him by people and becomes contaminated day after day. One should give up such a *guru* and take shelter of a qualified *guru*.

ŚRĪ BILAKTA TATVA VYĀNA

— The Devanāgarī —

Offered to
the feet of
of the great
Śrī Śrī Bhagavad Śaṅkara



ŚRĪ BHAKTA TATTVA VIJÑĀNA

— *The Devotee-principle* —

*Offered to
the lotus hands
of the most worshipable
Śrī-Śrī Bhagavat-bhaktas*

ŚRĪ BHAKTA TATVA VĪJĀNA

— The Devotional Principles —

Offered to
the lotus feet
of the most worshipable
Śrī-Śrī Bhagvan-ānanda

ॐ

ŚRĪ BHAKTA TATTVA VIJÑĀNA

WHO IS CALLED A BHAKTA?

Primarily, those who have devotion for God, Bhagavān, are called *bhaktas*. Śrīmad Rūpa Gosvāmīpāda has written: *tad bhāva bhāvita svāntāḥ kṛṣṇa-bhaktā itiritāḥ* (*Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, 2.1.273) – “Those whose hearts are filled with feelings for Kṛṣṇa are called *kṛṣṇa-bhaktas*.” There are two kinds of *kṛṣṇa-bhaktas*, namely *sādhakas* and *siddhas*.

*utpanna ratayaḥ samyak nairvighnyam anupāgatāḥ
kṛṣṇa sākṣāt kṛtau योग्याḥ sādhakāḥ parikīrtitāḥ
(Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu, 2.1.276)*

“Those whose *rati* (attraction) towards Kṛṣṇa has awakened, but who have not yet become free from all obstacles, and those who are qualified to meet Kṛṣṇa face to face, are called *sādhakās*.”

*avijñātākṣhila kleśāḥ sadā kṛṣṇāśrita kriyāḥ
siddhāḥ syuḥ santata prema saukhyāsvāda parāyaṇāḥ
(Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu, 2.1.280)*

“Those, who are free from all misery, such as ignorance and bodily consciousness, who are eternally engaged in their service to Kṛṣṇa and who are always dedicated to relishing the bliss of love for Kṛṣṇa, are called *siddhās*.”

In the 11th canto of *Śrīmad Bhāgavatā*, the definitions of the topmost devotee, the mediocre devotee and the junior devotee have been described as follows:

*sarva bhūteṣu yaḥ paśyed bhagavad bhāvam ātmanah
bhūtāni bhagavatyaṭmanyēṣa bhāgavatottamaḥ
(Śrīmad Bhāgavata, II.2.45)*

“He who sees His beloved Lord in everything conscious and unconscious and also sees within his enlightened heart everything conscious and unconscious in the Lord (the Lord being their shelter), or who sees that all living beings have the kind of love he has for the Lord, he is the greatest devotee of the Lord (basic translation of the *Krama Sandarbha Tīkā* on this *śloka*).”

These topmost devotees also have different stages; when their loving attachment to the Lord becomes very deep, they do not see the moving and nonmoving creatures anymore – they just see the Lord face to face. And when their loving attachment slightly slackens, they may actually see the shapes of the moving and non-moving creatures, but in between that, they experience the presence of their beloved Lord. In this essay, different definitions of the topmost devotee are described in a few *ślokas* from the *Bhāgavata*, and we are quoting some of these definitions here. He who sees the whole universe as filled with Viṣṇu, although he actually accepts the sense objects like forms and flavours through his senses, and does not waver in this – he is the topmost devotee. He who is not bewildered by the natural pangs of mundane existence, such as birth, death, hunger, thirst, fear or exhaustion, due to remembering Śrī Hari, is also a topmost devotee. He in the soil of whose heart no seed of fruitive desire can sprout, and for whom Śrī Vāsudeva is the only shelter – he is the topmost devotee. He who makes absolutely no distinction between his own wealth and the wealth of others, who sees everyone’s bodies equally and who has attained topmost peace by seeing all living entities as equal, is the topmost devotee.

In the opinion of the *Bhakti Sandarbha*, there are three kinds of such topmost devotees, who have attained *prema*: 1) *mūrchita kaṣāya* – those whose *kaṣāya* or subtle desires have become *mūrchita* or very tiny, like Śrī Bharata or Śrī Nārada in his birth as the son of a maidservant. 2) *nirdhūta kaṣāya* — those who do not even have a drop of subtle desire, like Śrī Śukadeva. 3) *prāpta bhagavat pārśada deha* – those who have attained a spiritual body as an associate of the Lord, such as Śrī Nārada. They are considered *mahābhāgavatas* according to the amount of *prema* they have attained. There are two kinds of excessive *prema* – 1) *svārūpādhikya* (excessive by nature) and 2) *parimāṇādhikya* (excessive in quantity). Of *svārūpādhikya*, a distinction must be made between the object and the subject. In other words, he who loves the *aṁśī* (the origin of all *avatāras*), Śrī Kṛṣṇa, is greater than he who loves the *aṁśas*, the other *avatāras*. Considering this, the *mūrchita kaṣāya*, Śrī Bilvamaṅgala, is greater than the eternal associates of the Lord like Śrī Hanumān and Puṇḍarīka. This distinction is based on the object or the worshipable deity. There is also distinction between the different kinds of *rati* of different *bhajana-kārīs* (devotees who perform *bhajana*). The *sakhya-rasa bhakta* is greater than the *dāsyā-rasa bhakta*. Greater than him is the *vātsalya-rasa bhakta*, and still greater than him is the *madhura-rasa premika bhakta*. If a *madhura-rasa premika bhakta* is still *mūrchita kaṣāya*, then, in the realm of *rasa*, he is still greater than the devotees in *śānta*, *dāsyā*, *sakhya* or *vātsalya* who have already attained a *pārśada-deha* (spiritual body). The deeper one's love for the Lord is, the greater a *premika bhakta* one is. The more *prema* a devotee has, the dearer he is to the Lord – *prema tārātamyenaiva bhakta mahattārātamyam mukhyam* (*Bhakti Sandarbha*, 187).

Prema is also considered greater according to the holy place with which it is related, for instance the love of a devotee in Śrī

Dvārakā is greater than the love of a devotee in Śrī Vaikuṇṭha. The Mathurā-devotee's love is greater than that, the Vṛndāvana-devotee is greater still, the Govardhana-devotee is much greater than that and the *premika bhakta* of Śrī Rādhākuṇḍa is the greatest of all.

The greatness of the devotee is also considered according to the amount or level of his *prema*. *Prema* gradually advances to *sneha*, *māna*, *praṇaya*, *rāga*, *anurāga* and *mahābhāva*. Therefore, one who has attained *sneha prema-bhakti* is exceeded by *premika* devotees who have attained *māna*, *praṇaya*, *rāga* and the other stages of *prema-bhakti* respectively. One who has attained *mahābhāva* has the greatest amount of *prema*. This *mahābhāva* is not present anywhere aside Vraja. Here, *mahābhāva* is the wealth of the *gopīs*, who are the sole receptacles of *madhura-rasa* for the *aṁśī* Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Considering this, the *anucarīs* (maidservants) who are surrendered to the lotus feet of Śrī Vṛṣabhānu-nandinī, are the greatest of all *premikas*.

In *Śrī Bṛhad Bhāgavatāmṛta*, five different kinds of devotees have been accepted, namely *jñāna-bhaktas* like Bharata and others, *suddha-bhaktas* like Ambarīṣa and others, *prema-bhaktas* like Śrī Hanumān and others, *prema-para-bhaktas* like Arjuna and the other Pāṇḍavas, and the *premātura-bhaktas* like Śrīmān Uddhava and the other Yādavas. In *Bṛhad Bhāgavatāmṛta*, the distinction between them is made through analysis. The best amongst them, Śrīmān Uddhava, desired to take birth in Śrī Vṛndāvana as a blade of grass or a shrub, desiring to attain a single speck of the Śrī Vraja-*gopikās'* footdust – this can be seen in the words of Śrīmān Uddhava Mahāśaya in *Śrīmad Bhāgavata*. When *bhakti* is in the heart, special qualities will arise within the mind and body of the *bhakta*. These must also be considered the characteristics of a Vaiṣṇava.

*sarva mahā-guṇagaṇa vaiṣṇava śarīre
 kṛṣṇa bhakte kṛṣṇera guṇa sakala sañcāre
 ei sab guṇa hoy vaiṣṇava lakṣaṇa
 sab kohā nā yāy kori dig dāśana
 (Caitanya Caritāmṛta)*

“All the great attributes are in the body of a Vaiṣṇava. Indeed, all of Kṛṣṇa’s divine qualities are infused within Kṛṣṇa’s *bhaktas*. These attributes constitute the characteristics of a Vaiṣṇava. They cannot all be described – I am only giving a slight indication here.”

One must remember here that none of Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s attributes can be fully infused into anyone else. Mere drops of these attributes are infused within the *bhakta* – only within Śrī Kṛṣṇa are they fully present.

*kṛpālu, akrta droha, satya sāra, sama
 nirdoṣa, vadānya, mṛdu śuci akiñcana
 sarvopakāraka, śānta, kṛṣṇaika-śaraṇa
 akāma, nirīha, sthira vijita śaḍ guṇa
 mitabhuk, apramatta, mānada, amānī
 gambhīra, karuṇa, maitra, kavi, dakṣa, maunī
 (Caitanya Caritāmṛta)*

“(The Vaiṣṇava is) Merciful, free from hostility, truthful, equi-poised, faultless, generous, tender, clean, detached, helpful to everyone, peaceful, surrendered only to Kṛṣṇa, free from lust, harmless, steady, victorious over the six enemies, a small eater, free from madness and hysteria, respectful, free from pride, grave, compassionate, friendly, poetic, expert and silent.”

Sādhavo 'doṣa darśinaḥ (The *sādhū* sees no faults). This characteristic is also accepted as a main one. Those who have become great souls through following the religion of *bhakti* do

not see faults in anyone. This one single attribute is again shown in three different phases – great, greater and greatest. He who does not look for others' faults, but rather sees all these faults as parts of people's virtues, is a *sādhū*, or a great soul (*mahat*). For example, a person may use harsh language, but the great soul considers these harsh words just like medicinal Nim-juice that will cure him and benefit him.

Then again, those who do not see faults in others, but only see virtues in them, are called the greater souls (*mahattara*). For instance, when they see many customers coming to a merchant, they think that "this merchant is very hospitable". Thus they think that the merchant's business, aimed at making profit, is a reception for guests.

Those who do not see faults and who consider a slight virtue to be a great virtue are called *mahattama-sādhū*, the greatest saints. For instance, an armed robber may rob him of his garments, but the *sādhū* will think – "Aha! This person has taken my garment because he felt cold! He is so merciful that although he carried a weapon he did not fire it at me, therefore he is blessed", and so on.

Then again, those who see virtues everywhere, even where there is no virtue, are the greatest saints of all. They will think, "There is no one bad in this world, everyone is great!" Śrīman Mahāprabhu has called the person who causes *bhakti* to arise in the heart as soon as he is seen the *uttama-bhakta*, the top-most devotee:

*prabhu kohe tumi mahā bhāgavatottama;
tomāra darśane sabhāra dravībhūta mana*

"The Lord said: You are the greatest of *mahā-bhāgavatas* – everyone's hearts melt when they see you."

The symptoms of the *uttama-bhāgavata's* *prema* are as follows:

*premera svabhāve bhakta hāse kānde gāya;
 unmatta hoiyā nāce iti uti dhāy
 sveda kampa romāścāśru gadgada vaivarṇya;
 unmāda viśāda dhairya garva haṛṣa dainya
 eto bhāve premā bhakta gaṇera nācāya;
 kṛṣṇera ānandāmṛta sāgare bhāsāya
 (Caitanya Caritāmṛta)*

“The nature of *prema* makes the devotee laugh, weep, sing, run here and there and dance out of ecstatic frenzy. Perspiration, shivering, goosepimples, tears, faltering voice, paling of the body, madness, sorrow, patience, pride, joy and humility – these are the moods that *prema* uses to make the devotees dance and float in an ocean of bliss and nectar of Kṛṣṇa-consciousness.”

The characteristics of the mediocre devotee are as follows:

*iśvare tad adhīneṣu bālīṣeṣu dviṣatsu ca;
 prema maitrī kṛpopekṣā yaḥ karoti sa madhyamaḥ
 (Śrīmad Bhāgavata, II.2.46)*

The meaning of this *śloka* is explained in the *Krama Sandarbha Tikā* – “He who loves the Supreme Lord and who has *rati* for the Lord, who is friendly towards the Lord’s devotees, who is merciful to those on the sideline who are not devotees, but who also do not despise or hate the Lord or His devotees, and who avoids the haters (those who hate him, the Lord or His devotees) is a mediocre devotee.”

That such a devotee has great compassion for the ignorant is proven from the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata-śloka* “*śoce tato*” (7.9.43) from the *Prahlāda-stava*. Śrī Prahlāda Mahāśaya told Śrī Nṛsiṃha: “O Lord! I lament for those fools who are disinclined toward Your nectar-topics, and who are simply carrying the heavy burden of household life due to their sensual desires!” Therefore,

the mediocre devotees are very compassionate toward those fools who are disinclined toward topics on the Personality of Godhead, but are not hostile or envious toward the Lord or His devotees. Such devotees are indifferent toward those who hate them personally, because such hatred cannot disturb their consciousness at all. Rather, they are also kind upon those who hate them personally, taking them to belong to the ignorant class of men mentioned above. It is heard that Śrī Prahlāda Mahāśaya showed compassion towards Hiranyakaśipu, who had been extremely hostile to him personally. But the mediocre *bhakta* does not develop compassion toward those who hate the Lord or His devotees, for such hatred will disturb their consciousness. The word 'hate' must also be read as 'nindā' or slander here. *Nindāpi dveṣa samā (Bhakti Sandarbha)*.

The difference between the mediocre devotee and the topmost devotee is that while the mediocre devotee shows compassion toward the ignorant, the topmost devotee, who perceives love for the Lord or things related to Him everywhere, will feel more friendship towards the ignorant. The mediocre devotee distinguishes between the devotees and the haters of the Lord, but the topmost devotee also abhors the hater of the Lord or His devotees. A *mahā-bhāgavata* (topmost devotee) like Śrī Śukadeva has also shown His aversion to the haters of the Lord or His devotees by saying (in *Śrīmad Bhāgavata* 10.1.35) *bhojānām kula-pāṁśanaḥ* – "Karnsa was a disgrace to the Bhoja-family."

The question may arise here: "Then how can we believe that the topmost *mahā-bhāgavata*-devotee perceives the Lord everywhere?" The *mahājanas* answer this question as follows: *teṣāṁ tu tatrāpi tad-vidha-śāstrtvena nijābhīṣṭa-deva parisphūrtir na vyāhanyate eva iti viśeṣaḥ. tad drṣṭyeva ca śrīmad uddhavādīnām api duryodhanādaḥ namaskāraḥ (Bhakti Sandarbha)* – "The

mahā-bhāgavatas see their beloved Lord in such haters in the form of the subduers of the wicked or the punishers of the opponents. Therefore we can see *mahā-bhāgavatas* like Śrī Uddhava offering obeisances to persons like Śrī Duryodhana." In other words, they offer obeisances to their beloved Lord, perceiving Him as the form of the subduer of the wicked in the haters of the Lord or His devotees, but they do not offer obeisances to the wicked from the bodily point of view. Thus it should be understood.

Previously, it has been said that the topmost devotees accept the faults of others also as virtues, but this applies to everyone except the haters of Viṣṇu and the Vaiṣṇavas.

The characteristics of the *kaniṣṭha-bhakta* (junior devotee) are as follows:

*arcāyām eva haraye pūjām yaḥ śraddhayehate
na tad bhakteṣu cānyeṣu sa bhaktaḥ prākṛtaḥ smṛtaḥ
(Śrīmad Bhāgavata, 11.2.47)*

"He who faithfully worships the deity-form of the Lord but does not worship the Lord's devotees or other people is a materialistic devotee, or a beginner."

The gist of the *Krama-Sandarbha*-commentary on this verse is that such a worshipper of the Lord has not developed genuine love for the Lord and is not aware of the glories of the Lord's devotees, nor does he understand that Śrī Hari is present in all the devotees and that all other living entities must also receive due respect. Therefore the faith that is described here is not scriptural faith, because the *bhakti*-scriptures do not say that only Śrī Hari is to be worshipped, but rather that all His devotees are to be worshipped alongside Him, and that all other living entities must be given due respect due to the fact that Śrī Hari resides in them too. In the verse *yasyātma buddhiḥ kuṇape*

(*Bhāg.* 10.84.13), Śrī Kṛṣṇa says: "A person who identifies himself with his body that is made of three elements, who considers his wife and children to be his own, who considers an earthen statue of a demigod to be worshipable, and who considers a holy place only to consist of its sacred water but does not make friends with the holy men who reside there, is foolish like a cow or an ass." This is why such a person remains averse to worshipping the devotees, and it is quite impossible for him to worship all living entities. The scriptures also say that anyone who worships Govinda without serving His devotees is not a devotee, but is simply arrogant. Such a person is a neophyte or pseudo-devotee. Śrī Jīva-pāda mentions in his commentary on the verse dealing with the main neophyte devotee: *ajāta-premā śāstrīya śraddhā-yuktaḥ sādhaḥ tu mukhya kaṇiṣṭha jñeyah* – "A person who has faith in the scriptures but has not awakened any love for God yet is the leading neophyte devotee." When scriptural faith is there, then a person will act according to all the injunctions of the *bhakti* scriptures with courage. In *Śrī Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, Śrīman Mahāprabhu has given the definitions of the *vaiṣṇava*, the *vaiṣṇavatara* (greater Vaiṣṇava) and the *vaiṣṇavatama* (the greatest Vaiṣṇava) as follows:

*tabe rāmānanda āra satyarāja khān
prabhura caraṇe kichu koilo nivedana
gr̥hastha viṣayī āmi kī mora sādhanē
śrī mukhe ājñā koro prabhu nivedi caraṇe
prabhu kohe – kṛṣṇa sevā vaiṣṇava sevana
nirantara koro kṛṣṇa nāma saṅkīrtana
satyarāja kohe – vaiṣṇava cinibo kemone?
ke vaiṣṇava koho tāra sāmānya lakṣaṇe
prabhu kohe – yāra mukhe śuni eka bāra
kṛṣṇa nāma, pūjya sei śreṣṭha sabhākāra*

“Then Rāmānanda Vasu and Satyarāja Khān submitted at the Lord’s feet: ‘We are fallen householders and sense enjoyers – what should we do? Please order us, O Lord, this is our humble prayer at Your lotus feet!’ The Lord replied: ‘Serve the deity of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, serve the Vaiṣṇavas and constantly engage in Kṛṣṇa-nāma-saṅkīrtana.’ Satyarāja Khān said: ‘How do I recognise a Vaiṣṇava? Tell me, who is a Vaiṣṇava, and what are his general characteristics?’ The Lord replied: ‘He from whose mouth I hear even one name of Kṛṣṇa is worshipable and he is the greatest of all!’”

*kulīna grāmī pūrvavat koilo nivedana
prabhu ājñā koro āmāra kartavya sādhana
prabhu kohe – vaiṣṇava sevā nāma saṅkīrtana
dui koro, śīghra pābe śrī kṛṣṇa caraṇa
teṅho kohe – ke vaiṣṇava, ki tāra lakṣaṇa
tabe hāsi kohe prabhu jāni tāra mana
kṛṣṇa nāma nirantara yābhāra vadane
sei vaiṣṇava śreṣṭha, bhajo tābhāra caraṇe
varṣāntare punaḥ tārā aiche praśna koilo
vaiṣṇavera tāratamya prabhu śikhāilo
yābhāra darśane mukhe āise kṛṣṇa nāma
tābhāre jānio tumi vaiṣṇava pradhāna
krama kori kohe prabhu vaiṣṇava lakṣaṇa
vaiṣṇava, vaiṣṇavatara āra vaiṣṇavatama*

“Like before, the resident of Kulīna prayed: ‘Lord, order me, what should I do?’ The Lord replied: ‘Serve the Vaiṣṇavas and engage in nāma saṅkīrtana. If you do these two things you will swiftly attain the lotus feet of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.’ The resident of Kulīna said: ‘Who is a Vaiṣṇava and what are his characteristics?’ Then the Lord smiled and, knowing his mind, said: ‘A person whose mouth always vibrates the name of Kṛṣṇa is the greatest Vaiṣṇava

– worship his lotus feet.’ The next year the same question was asked and the Lord then taught the disparity between different classes of Vaiṣṇavas. ‘You should know those who bring the holy name of Kṛṣṇa to your mouth at mere sight to be the greatest Vaiṣṇavas!’ Then the Lord gradually explained the difference between the different levels of Vaiṣṇavas – *vaiṣṇava*, *vaiṣṇavātara* and *vaiṣṇavatama*.”

Śrīmad Jīva Gosvāmīpāda has written: *tad evaṁ kalau nāma kīrtana pracāra prabhāvenaiva parama bhagavat parāyaṇatva siddhir darśitā* (*Bhakti Sandarbha*, 274) – “On the strength of preaching *nāma saṅkīrtana* in the age of Kali one becomes seen as a *siddha parama-bhāgavata*.”

In *Śrī Gīta-Śāstra*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa tells Śrī Arjuna: *yo mad bhakta sa me priyaḥ* – “My devotee is very dear to Me.” Therefore the dearer a person is to Kṛṣṇa, the greater a devotee he is. There is no doubt about that. In the verses starting with *adveṣṭa sarva bhūtānām* (*Gītā*, 12.13-19), Śrī Kṛṣṇa has mentioned many of the qualities of His unalloyed devotees, and in the end, He has also mentioned what the result will be if aspirant-devotees, who desire to attain all such qualities of a pure devotee, hear, recite and consider these great devotee-virtues that emanated from His lotus mouth:

*ye tu dharmāmṛtam idaṁ yathoktaṁ paryupāsate
śraddhadhānā mat paramā bhaktās te'tiva me priyāḥ
(Bhagavad Gītā, 12.20)*

“O Arjuna! I have mentioned so many different attributes of different kinds of devotees, but these *siddha-bhaktas* are all fixed in one virtue each. In other words, some are free from malice and hatred towards all living beings, others are kind friends of all living beings, etc. Those aspirant devotees who desire to develop the attributes of the devotees who are already fixed in

one of these attributes, who have become surrendered to Me by hearing, reciting and considering the nectarean, immortal religious principles described above by Me, are extremely dear to Me. That is because although they are still only *sādhakas* (aspirants), they have become greater than the *siddhas* who have attained only one of these attributes, because they aspire to attain all of them."

This has been made clear by the use of the word *atīva*. (Translation of the gist of Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartipāda's *ṭīkā* on the aforementioned verse). In the appendix of the *Gītā*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa reveals from His own mouth which devotee is dearer to the Lord than any other devotee in the world:

*ya imam paramam guhyam mad bhakteṣvabhīdhāsyati
bhaktim mayi parām kṛtvā mām evaiśyatyasaṁśayaḥ
na ca tasmān manuṣyeṣu kaścin me priya kṛttamaḥ
bhavitā na ca me tasmād anyah priyataro bhūvi
(Bhagavad Gītā, 18.68-69)*

Śrī Kṛṣṇa said: "O Arjuna! He who teaches this most confidential scripture to My devotees attains the highest form of devotion, and will certainly attain Me. In this human world, there is no one who can please Me more, and no one is dearer to Me, either in past, present or future."

From the divine words emanating from Śrī Kṛṣṇa's mouth, we learn that nothing in the world is dearer to Him than the *bhakti-sāstras* and that there is no greater *sādhana* the devotees can perform than to hear these *sāstras*. Those who make Śrī Hari's devotees relish the flavours of the *bhakti-sāstras* are blessed by attaining the attribute of being the Lord's dearest devotees. Natural devotees subsist only by relishing the mellows of these *sāstras*. But it should be noted that the teachers of the *sāstras* should behave like saints, being satisfied with whatever

comes to them naturally, being totally devoid of selfishness and being completely surrendered. It should also be understood that a person who behaves in an unsaintly manner may be teaching the *śāstras*, but he cannot be dear to the Lord. The definition of a *bhāgavata paramahaṁsa* is thus given in *Śrīmad Bhāgavata*:

*yatrānuraktāḥ sahasaiva dhīrā
vyapohya dehādiṣu saṅga mūḍham
vrajanti tat pāramahaṁsyam antyaṁ
yasminn abhimsopaśamaḥ sva dharma
(Śrīmad Bhāgavata, 1.18.22)*

Antyaṁ pāramahaṁsyam bhāgavata paramahaṁsatvaṁ yasmin yad artham abhimsayā mātsaryādi rāhityena upaśamo bhagavan niṣṭhā vidhiyate ityarthah (Krama Sandarbha Tīkā) – “All devotees who are attached to the Lord give up their attachment to the body and ascend to the level of *bhāgavata paramahaṁsa*. Anyone who has ascended to that level is free from envy and malice and acts in natural fixation in the Lord.” Śrī Kṛṣṇa has said to Śrī Uddhava:

*jñāna niṣṭho virakto vā mad bhakto vānapekṣakah
salīṅgānāśramāṁs tyaktvā cared avidhi gocarah
(Śrīmad Bhāgavata, 11.18.27)*

“My devotee (whose *bhāva* for Me has awakened) is fixed in transcendental knowledge, is renounced and is not waiting even for social distinction or for liberation. Such a devotee gives up household life and becomes *avidhi gocara*, which means that he wanders around, transcending the scriptural injunctions that propound *āśrama-dharma* (the stages of a celibate student, householder, recluse etc.). Although he transcends the scriptural injunctions, because he has a pure heart he never engages in sinful activities that are forbidden by the scriptures, such as

slandering others, committing violence against others, stealing the wife or property of others, lying, being envious or hostile. A devotee whose love for God has awoken gives up *āśrama-dharma* with its subtle identifications, while a devotee whose love for God has not yet awoken remains inwardly free from identification with his *āśrama* even though he may still dwell in a certain *āśrama*. In this way he also renounces his *āśrama*.* (Translation of the gist of Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartīpāda's commentary)

*eto sab chāḍi āra varṇāśrama dharma
akiñcana hoiyā loy kṛṣṇaika śaraṇa
vidhi dharma chāḍi bhaje kṛṣṇera carāṇa
niṣiddha pāpācāre tāra kabhu nahe mana
(Caitanya Caritāmṛta)*

“Give up all this along with the *varṇāśrama-dharma*, become renounced and take exclusive shelter of Kṛṣṇa. Those who have given up compulsory devotion and worship Kṛṣṇa's lotus feet never think of committing sinful activities.”

Those who see no faults in virtues, but make proper distinction between virtues and faults are called ordinary saints. With the eyes of the scriptures they neutrally distinguish between virtues and faults, and they are called *sadācāra-bhaktas*. *Śaṅgeṇa sādhu bhaktānām sādhu atra sadācāraḥ* (*Bhakti Sandarbha*, 201). One must associate with such devotees. Such saints are the greatest benefactors of a person like me, because they will distinguish between my virtues and the faults and tell me to give up the faults. Then, when I don't accept their instructions, they will bestow mercy upon me by punishing me. Those *mahā-*

* For a description of the activities and characteristics of the *jāta-ruci*, *jātāsakti*, *jāta-bhāva* and *jāta-prema bhaktas*, see my presentation of *Mādhurya Kādambinī*.

bhāgavatas who consider even the fallen souls to be the topmost saints or consider themselves to be lower than blades of grass will not always bestow mercy upon a person like me. A person like me is not aware of the time or the circumstance in which such great souls bestow their mercy upon the living entities. Therefore it is the best thing if ordinary *sādhakas* associate with the abovementioned ordinary *mahātmās*.

THE ONLY CAUSE FOR ATTAINING BHAKTI IS
THE ASSOCIATION AND THE GRACE OF THE BHAKTAS

All the scriptures sing with one voice the great glories of the association of devotees. Since beginningless time, the living beings have been wandering through 8.400.000 species of life, bound by *māyā* and floating in the ghastly current of *saṁsāra*. The only way to become free from this condition of bondage by *māyā* is by attaining devotion for the lotus feet of the Supreme Lord, which is again only attained by associating with the Lord's devotees and receiving their mercy.

*mahat kṛpā vinā kon karme bhakti noy
kṛṣṇa-prāpti dūre rahu – saṁsāra nabe kṣoy
(Caitanya Caritāmṛta)*

“Without the grace of the great souls, no activity can be counted as *bhakti*. Let alone attaining Kṛṣṇa, even liberation from material bondage is not possible.”

Aside associating with the *sādhus*, there is no other way to free the contaminated heart from the subtle desires it has had since beginningless time and to become favorable to the Lord's lotus feet.

Śrīmat Jīva Gosvāmī has clearly corroborated that with special considerations in Śrī Bhakti Sandarbha: *atha bhagavat*

*krpāiva tat sānmukhye prāthamikam kāraṇam iti ca gauṇam. sā hi saṁsāra durantānanta santāpa santaptesvapi tad vimukheṣu svatantrā na pravartate tad asambhavāt. krpā-rūpaśceto vikāro hi para duḥkasya sva cetasi sparśe satyeva jāyate. tasya tu yadā paramānanda rasatvenāpahata kalmaṣatvena ca śrutau jīva vilakṣaṇatvasādhanaṁ tejo mālīnyas timirāyogavat tac cetasyapi tamomaya duḥka sparśanāsambhavena, tatra tasyā janmā-sambhavaḥ. ataeva sarvadā virājamāne'pi karttūm akarttūm anyathākarttūm samarthe tasmin tad vimukhānām na saṁsāra santāpa śāntiḥ. ataḥ sat krpāivāvaśiṣyate. santo'pi tadānīm yadyapi saṁsāra dukhair na sprśanta eva, tathāpi labdha jāgarāḥ svapna duḥkavat te kadācit smareyur apītyatas teṣāṁ saṁsārike'pi krpā bhavati . . . tasmād yā krpā tasya satsu vartate sā sat saṅga vāhanaiva vā sat krpāvāhanaiva vā satī jīvāntare saṁkramate na svatantrēti sthitam (Bhakti Sandarbha, 180) – “Although the grace of the Lord is the primary cause of becoming favorable to Him, it is still secondary, because it is impossible for the grace of the Lord to independently reach the conditioned souls, who are afflicted by the scorching fire of material existence and who are averse to the Lord. Mercy is a kind of mental transformation, which awakens when the misery of others touches the heart of a merciful soul. The Supreme Lord is always the embodiment of the topmost transcendental *rasika* ecstasy – what a difference there is between Him and the sinful and ignorant living being! Just as the shining sun can never touch the darkness, similarly the false misery that the living being is suffering from can never touch the heart of Śrī Hari, that is impossible in all respects. Therefore, although there is always an ocean of mercy within Śrī Bhagavān's heart, and the Lord is able to do everything, there is no end to the material miseries of the living entities who are averse to Him. Therefore, the only thing that remains to redeem the conditioned souls is the mercy of the great saint.*

Although the hearts of such great souls are also not touched by the false misery of the material world, still, just as the wakeful human being considers the suffering he went through in dreams to be false, he can still remember this misery when he sees other people sleeping and dreaming and is eager to awaken them. In the same way, the devotees who have woken up from the slumber of illusion can have mercy towards the conditioned souls who are suffering different kinds of false miseries that appear like different kinds of dreams in the material world. Therefore, the mercy of the Lord that dwells in the hearts of the great souls is infused within the hearts of the conditioned souls through the vehicles of *sat-saṅga* (association with the great devotee) and *sat-kṛpā* (the grace of a great devotee), not independently. If ordinary gods and goddesses do not go anywhere without their vehicles, then would the crownjewel of all of the Supreme Lord's energies, Mahādevī Bhagavat Kṛpā (the great goddess of God's grace) go anywhere without a vehicle?

Therefore, the association of the *bhaktas* is the only flawless way to attain *bhakti* and the proximity of the Lord. In his praises of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Śrīla Mucukunda has said:

*bhavāpavargo bhramato yadā bhavej
janasya tarhyacyuta sat samāgamah
sat saṅgamo yarhi tad eva sad gatau
parāvareṣe tvayi jāyate matiḥ*

“O Lord! When the time has come for the living entity, who is revolving through endless reincarnations, to end his material conditioning, then he will reach the proximity of saints, and when he attains their saintly company, then he will become lovingly inclined towards You, who are, after all, the Supreme Controller of both cause and effects and the only shelter of such saints.”

To show that the best way to terminate mundane existence is the company of the saints, the termination of mundane existence is mentioned first and the company of saints is mentioned afterwards. The *alaṅkārikas* (knowers of poetic embellishments) describe this as the fourth type of *atiśayokti alaṅkāra*: *caturthī sā kāraṇasya gaditum śīghra kārītām yā hi kāryasya pūrvoktiḥ* – “In order to describe how quickly a cause can display its effects, the symptoms are sometimes described before the cause. This is called the fourth type of *atiśayokti alaṅkāra*.” Here the root cause of the termination of mundane existence is the company of the saints, and although the termination of mundane existence is the effect, the company of saints accomplishes this so swiftly that it cannot even be noticed anymore whether company of the saints took place first or the termination of mundane existence.

Another thing that should be noticed is that the termination of mundane existence is not the primary effect of association with the saints – the primary effect is the development of *bhakti* for the lotus feet of Śrī Hari. The termination of mundane existence is a side effect. The termination of mundane existence is regarded as darkness and the company of the saints is regarded as the sun. Just as darkness simultaneously disappears when the sun rises, similarly the darkness of ignorance that accompanies mundane existence at once disappears along with the sunrise of *sādhū-saṅga*. That is why Śrī Kṛṣṇa told Śrī Nalakuvara and Maṇigrīva:

*sādhūnām sama cittānām sutarām mat kṛtātmanām
darśanān no bhaved bandhaḥ puṁso 'kṣnoḥ savitur yathā
(Śrīmad Bhāgavata, 10.10.41)*

“When the conditioned souls see the saints who have given their hearts to Me and that they are always equipoised, there will be

no more material bondage for them, just as the eyes are no longer bound to darkness when the sun rises.”

Therefore whenever there is the company of saints, mundane existence will be terminated as a side effect and love for Śrī Hari will develop as the main result.

Here one may ask, “Why don’t we always experience such powerful effects of the company of the *bhaktas*, or why do we see so often that the faults of aversion towards the Lord are not destroyed and love for the Lord’s lotus feet does not awaken, despite associating with the *sādhus*?” To this, *Śrīmad Bhāgavata* answers: This applies to the offenders. An offenceless person will certainly experience the abovementioned results. Although association with *sādhus* may be there, the *sādhus* do not wish to bestow their mercy upon offenders, as is stated in the *Bhāgavata* (3.5.44):

*tān vai hyasavṛttibhir akṣibhir ye
parākṛtāntar manasaḥ pareśaḥ
atho na paśyantyurugāya nūnam
ye te padanyāsa vilāsa lakṣmyāḥ*

“O Urugaya (widely praised One)! O Pareśa (Supreme Controller)! Your *bhaktas*, who are always placed around Your beautiful lotus feet, certainly do not like to cast a glance at the unsaintly persons who are averse to You due to their unreal or offensive sensual activities!” This authoritative verse shows that the devotees of the Lord do not cast a glance at the offenders who are averse to the Lord.

Here it should be noted that the words *asad indriya-vṛtti* in the above verse does not just refer to mundane sensual activities of the non-devotees, because unless and until the great souls cast their merciful glances, everyone’s sensual activities remain mundane. Rather, this phrase must be explained as “the

sensual activities of offenders”, because the great souls shower the ordinary non-devotees with their grace. This is described in *Śrīmad Bhāgavata* (3.5.3):

*janasya kṛṣṇād vimukhasya daivād
adharma śīlasya suduḥkitasya
anugrahāyeha caranti nūnam
bhūtāni bhavyāni janārdanasya*

Śrī Vidura Mahāśaya told Śrīla Maitreya Ṛṣi: “O master! Great auspicious devotees of Śrī Kṛṣṇa like you wander over the world to bestow their grace to the conditioned souls who are disinclined towards Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who are irreligious due to the overwhelming influence of their previous activities and who feel very miserable due to this.”

Therefore, if a person is only contaminated due to being disinclined towards Śrī Kṛṣṇa, but is otherwise non-offensive, then simple association with the saints will erase this fault and make him become inclined towards the Lord. However, if someone is not inclined towards the Lord and is an offender as well, he will not be able to become free from the fault of indifference towards the Lord and turn towards the lotus feet of the Lord on the mere strength of association with the devotees. But, when they receive the merciful glance of a great soul, they will be free from the fault of offensiveness and become inclined toward the lotus feet of Śrī Hari. This is the solution of that question. The greatly realised devotees will certainly bestow their grace on the offenseless. In other words, even if he does not realise that “this is a great soul”, and even if the great soul does not think, “I should bestow my mercy on this wretch”, and does not cast a merciful glance on him, still, simply by associating with the great soul, the conditioned soul will become inclined towards the lotus feet of the Lord. But if the great soul bestows his

grace on the offender without looking at the offences, because it is simply his nature to be kind, then the offender can become inclined towards Śrī Hari's lotus feet. An offender cannot simply become inclined towards the lotus feet of Śrī Hari on the strength of his association with a great soul without getting his active mercy.

The example of these two kinds of persons is Śrī Nalakuvara, Maṇigrīva and the ordinary gods. In the description of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's tearing down of the Yamalārjuna trees, it is seen that Śrī Nalakuvara and Maṇigrīva had disrespected and ignored Devarṣi Nārada and had thus become offenders. Still, out of his causeless mercy, Devarṣi Nārada ignored their offences and instead blessed them by giving them offenceless residence in Vṛndāvana, giving them the *darśana* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa in His Śrī Bāla Gopāla *mūrti* along with remembrance of their previous activities, and giving them unshakeable devotion to His lotus feet. But Indra and the other demigods who had violated the etiquette towards the great saints could not attain devotion to Śrī Hari, although they saw Śrīpāda Devarṣi again and again. So when they sometimes offer praises to Śrī Kṛṣṇa, that is done only for their own purposes. If the Lord does something which does not fulfill their wishes, then they will not even hesitate to commit violence toward Him. This is clearly shown in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavatā* when it is described how Śrī Kṛṣṇa stopped the sacrifice to Indra during one of His pastimes.

A doubt may arise against this conclusion, namely when Śrī Prahlāda Mahāśaya offered praises to Śrī Nṛsiṃhadeva he said: *naitān vihāya kṛpāṇān vimumukṣa eko nānyam tvad asya śaraṇam bhramato 'nupaśye* – "O Lord! I do not wish to be liberated alone without taking all the miserable living beings, who are wandering around in the wheel of constant reincarnations, with me. I cannot see anyone else as merciful as You who can give

shelter to these helpless creatures!" If Śrī Prahlāda was so merciful to all living beings of the world, then why were they not all redeemed?

The answer to this question is that there are innumerable living beings, and not all of these countless living beings arose within Śrī Prahlāda's heart. He prayed to Śrī Nṛsiṃhadeva for those whose misery he had seen and heard of, and they were certainly redeemed. This is the conclusion of Śrīmat Jīva Gosvāmī, who is the *jīva bandhu*, the friend of the living beings. Brahmarṣi Bharata told King Rahūgaṇa that knowledge about God cannot be attained through any other means than by serving the footdust of the great saints, and he has clearly described that:

*rahūgaṇaitat tapasā na yāti
na cejyayā nirvapaṇād gṛhād vā
na cchandasā naiva jalāgni sūryair
vinā mahat pādarajo'bhiṣekam
(Śrīmad Bhāgavata, 5.12.12)*

"O Mahārāja Rahūgaṇa! Without being showered by the footdust of the great saints, austerities, Vedic activities, donations of foodgrains, construction of social housing, study of the Vedas or the worship of water, fire or the sun cannot help one attain knowledge of God!"

Śrī Prahlāda Mahāśaya also described the service of the footdust of the great saints as the best way to attain love for the Lord's lotus feet:

*naiṣāṁ matis tāvad urukramāṅghrim
spṛṣṭyanarthāpagamo yad arthaḥ
mahīyasāṁ pāda rajo'bhiṣekam
niṣkiñcanānām na vṛṇīta yāvat
(Śrīmad Bhāgavata, 7.5.32)*

“As long as one is not showered with the footdust of the saints who are totally free from sense gratification, no one will be able to touch the lotus feet of the Lord. In other words, until then, no one can have love for Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s lotus feet. When love for Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s lotus feet is developed, all mischief will disappear from the heart.”

*bhakta pada dhūli āra bhakta padajala
bhakta bhukta avaśeṣa – tina mahābala
ei tina sevāite kṛṣṇa premā hoy
punaḥ punaḥ sarva sāstre phukāriyā koy
tāte bāra bāra kōhi śuno bhaktagaṇa
viśvāsa kōriyā koro e tina sevana
tina hoite kṛṣṇa nāma premera ullāsa
kṛṣṇera prasāda tāte sākṣi kālī dāsa
(Caitanya Caritāmṛta)*

“The footdust of a devotee, the footwater of a devotee and the food-remnants of a devotee – these three are very powerful. The scriptures exclaim again and again that service of these three cause *kṛṣṇa-premā*. O devotees, hear me! That is why I am saying again and again – serve these three items with faith! These three cause the ecstasy of *prema* of Kṛṣṇa’s name, and cause the grace of Kṛṣṇa to descend. Kālī dāsa is the living proof of that.”

When Śrīman Mahāprabhu performed His pastimes, Śrīla Kālidāsa Rāya, who was fixed in his devotion to the foot-nectar and the lip nectar of the devotees, was blessed by attaining mercy from Śrīman Mahāprabhu in Nīlācala that was not attained by others.* Śrīla Narottama Ṭhākura Mahāśaya has said:

* See *Caitanya Caritāmṛta Antya Līlā*, chapter 16

*vaiṣṇavera pada jala, kṛṣṇa bhakti dite bol,
 āra keho nahe balavanta - ityādi
 vaiṣṇavera ucchiṣṭa, tāhe mora mana niṣṭha,
 vaiṣṇavera nāmete ullāsa - ityādi*

“The foot water of the Vaiṣṇava can give the power of *kṛṣṇa-bhakti*. Nothing is as powerful as that.”

“My mind is fully fixed in the Vaiṣṇavas’ foodremnants and rejoices in the names of the Vaiṣṇavas.”

*bhagavad bhakta pādābhja pādukābhyo namo'stu me
 yat saṅgamaḥ sādhanam ca sādhyam cākḥilam uttamam*

“I offer my obeisances unto the shoes that hold the lotus feet of the devotees of the Lord, whose association yields the fruits of all practise and perfections.”

THE COMPANY OF THE BHAKTAS FULFILLS ALL HUMAN PURSUITS

All mischief is destroyed and all human pursuits are fulfilled by associating with the *bhaktas*:

*yathopāśrayamānasya bhagavantam vibhāvasum
 śitam bhayam tamo'pyeti sādḥūn samsevatas tathā
 (Śrīmad Bhāgavata, II.26.31)*

“Just as cold, fear and darkness are all destroyed when one takes shelter of the fire-god, similarly the darkness of fruitive activities, fear of material existence and obstacles in *bhajana* are destroyed when one takes shelter of the saints.” In his commentary on this verse, Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartīpāda has written: *svīyaudana siddhyartham upāśrayamānasya apyeti, tathaiiva bhajana siddhyartham sādḥūn samsevamānasya karmādi*

jādyam bhajana vighnaśca. "When one sits near the fire that cooks the rice, cold, fear and darkness are destroyed as a side effect. Similarly, when one associates with the saints for attaining *bhajana-siddhi* and *prema*, the darkness of fruitive activities, fear of mundane existence and obstacles in *bhajana* are automatically destroyed."

Association with the saints is more glorious than pilgrimages:

*gaṅgādi puṇya tīrtheṣu yo naraḥ snātum icchatī
yaḥ karoti satām saṅgam tayoh sat saṅgamo varaḥ
(Padma Purāṇa)*

"Of the person who faithfully bathes in the Gaṅgā and the person who associates with the saints, the person who associates with the saints is the better."

Association with the saints is the most auspicious activity:

*yaḥ snātaḥ śānti sitayā sādhu saṅgati gaṅgayā
kim tasya dānaiḥ kim tīrthaiḥ kim tapobhiḥ kim adhvaraiḥ*

"What is the need for donations, pilgrimages, austerities or sacrifices for the one who bathes in the white Gaṅgā of association with the saints?" (*ibid.*)

In the *Vāsiṣṭha* it is described that the company of saints brings the greatest good even in times of woe:

*śunyatā pūrṇatāmeti mṛtir apyamṛtāyate
āpat sampad ivābhāti vidvajjana samāgame*

"When the learned devotees come to the house, then the emptiness felt there due to the separation from friends is filled up, the dead attain immortality (they attain the lotus feet of the Lord), and *āpada* (disaster) turns into *mahā-sampad* (a great treasure)."

The bliss of the company of a devotee makes one forget all bodily conditions:

*te na smarantyatitarām priyam īśa martyam
 ye cānvadam suta subhṛd grha vitta dārāḥ
 ye tvabhja-nābha bhavadīya padāravinda
 saugandhya lubdha hṛdayeṣu kṛta prasāṅgāḥ
 (Śrīmad Bhāgavata, 4.9.12)*

“O lotus-naveled Lord! Those, who associate with the devotees whose hearts are greedy after the scent of Your lotus feet, forget all about their beloved human body, and all that is connected with it, such as home, wealth, friends, children and wife.”

The company of devotees delights the whole world:

*rasāyanamayī śītā paramānanda dāyini
 nānandayati kaṁ nāma vaiṣṇavāśraya cāndrikā
 (Padma Purāṇa)*

“Who will not be pleased by the moonrays of the shelter of the Vaiṣṇavas, which destroys all disease and affliction and which gives topmost bliss?”

The company of the devotees is the essence of everything, as the *Brhan Nāradya* says:

*asāra bhūte saṁsāre sāram etad ajātmaja
 bhagavad bhakta saṅgo hi hari bhaktim samicchatām*

“O Son of Brahmā! The best practice for those in this worthless material world who desire Hari-*bhakti* is to associate with the Lord’s devotees.”

The only way for relishing the nectarean topics of the Lord is through association with the Lord’s devotees:

*yatra bhāgavatā rājan sādhaso viśadāśayāḥ
 bhagavad guṇānukathana śravaṇa vyagra cetasaḥ
 tasmin mahān mukharitā madhubhic caritra
 pīyūṣa śeṣa saritaḥ paritaḥ sravanti*

tā ye pibantyavitṛṣo nṛpa gāḍha karnaīs
tān na spr̥śantyaśana tṛṇ-bhaya śoka mohāḥ
(Śrīmad Bhāgavata, 4.29.40-41)

Śrī Nārada told Mahārāja Prācīnabarhi: “O King! Wherever the saintly devotees of the Lord, who only have sacred aspirations and who are eager to hear the constant glorification of the Lord’s attributes, reside, a river of the essence of nectar in the form of topics of Lord Madhusūdana flows in all four directions, as it emanates from their mouths. Those who diligently drink that nectar of topics of the Lord through the cups of their ears will not be suffering from hunger, thirst, fear, lamentation or illusion anymore.”

In his commentary on this verse, Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmipāda has written: *sat saṅgamantareṇa svayam eva kathā cintanādāv ālasyādinā rasāveśābhāvataḥ kṣut pipāsādyabbihūtasya bhaktya-sambhavād avaśyaṁ sat saṅgo vidheyaḥ tataś ca bhagavat kathāmṛta rasa pānādi rūpā bhaktiḥ svataḥ sampadyata eveti bhāvataḥ* – “When one discusses or meditates on *hari-kathā* just on one’s own, without the company of the saints, then fatigue will come in one’s meditation, and the resulting lack of taste will cause feelings of hunger and thirst and so on. Thus, a human being will not be able to relish the mellows of *bhakti*. It is therefore absolutely essential to associate with the devotees. In the company of the great devotees, *bhakti*, in the form of drinking the nectar of *bhagavat-kathā*, will automatically be accomplished.” This is because *bhakti* is automatically attained in the company of the *bhaktas*. It is said in the *Bṛhan Nāradiya Purāṇa*:

bhaktis tu bhagavad bhakta saṅgena parijāyate
sat saṅga prāpyate pumbhiḥ sukr̥taiḥ pūrva sañcитай

“When one associates with the devotees of the Lord, devotion to the Lord will awaken. A person who has previously collected a lot of pious merit will attain the company of saintly devotees.”

Association with the devotees subdues the Lord, as is explained in *Śrīmad Bhāgavata* (II.12.1-2):

*athaitat parama guhyam śrīvato yadunandana
sugopyam api vakṣyāmi tvaṁ me bhrtyaḥ suhṛt sakḥā
na rodhayati mām yogo na saṅkhyam dharma eva vā
na svādhyāyas tapas tyāgo neṣṭāpūrtam na dakṣiṇā
vratāni yajñaśchandāmsi tīrthāni niyamā yamāḥ
yathāvarundhe sat saṅgaḥ sarva saṅgāpaho hi mām*

The Lord told Śrī Uddhava: “O Yadunandana! Listen to this supreme secret. Since you are My servant, heart’s friend and companion, I will tell you a very confidential thing – eightfold *yoga*, discriminative *sāṅkhya*-philosophy, virtues like non-violence and adherence to the caste and *āśrama* system, study of the Vedas, penance, *sannyāsa*, *agniṣṭoma* and other sacrifices, construction of wells and gardens, charity, following vows like *Ekādaśī*, worship of the demigods, knowing the secrets of *mantras*, serving the holy places of pilgrimage, control of the inner (mind) and outer senses, do not please and subdue Me as much as the company of the saints does, which removes all material attachments.”

This is because the association with the Lord’s devotees is itself the highest human pursuit:

*tulayāma lavenāpi na svargaṁ na punarbhavam
bhagavat saṅgi saṅgasya martyānām kim utāśiṣaḥ
(Śrīmad Bhāgavata, 1.18.13)*

Śaunaka and the other *ṛṣis* told Śrī Sūta Muni: “O Sūta! We do not compare even a moments company of the great devotees

with heavenly pleasures or even liberation, what to speak of temporary blessings for which human beings are praying?" Therefore *Śrīmad Bhāgavata* said: *ayaṁ hi paramo lābho nṛṇāṁ sādhu samāgamaḥ* (12.10.7). "The greatest gain of a human being is the company of the saints." From the scriptures and the great saints, we learn that *prema* and the service of the lotus feet of the Lord are the greatest gain one can make in the world. If the association of the saints is the means of attaining *prema*, then why is the association with *sādhus* called the highest gain here? Such questions are natural. The answer is that association is a devotional practice; *bhakti* itself is *sādhu-saṅga* and the fruit of *bhakti* is also *sādhu-saṅga*. *Prema* is the only thing that can subdue Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and if *sādhu-saṅga* subdues Śrī Kṛṣṇa, then we can understand that there is absolutely no difference between the cause, *sādhu-saṅga*, and the effect, *prema*. *Kārya kāraṇayor abhedāt*. As a result of the excellent company of saintly devotees, a human being can easily attain love for the lotus feet of the Lord, and become blessed:

*satām prasāṅgān mama vīrya samvido
bhavanti hṛt karṇa rasāyanāḥ kathāḥ
tajjoṣanād āśvapavarga vartmani
śraddhā rati bhaktir anukramiṣyati
(Śrīmad Bhāgavata, 3.25.25)*

Lord Śrī Kapiladeva told His mother Devahūti: "O Mother! When one has the excellent association with the *sādhus*, then topics about My glories arise that serve as an elixir to both the ears and the heart. By lovingly enjoying these topics, that form the road to liberation, gradually faith, attachment and love for Me will develop."

Here, the best way of associating with the *sādhus* is association with the full attention of body, mind and words. In other

words, this means serving the *sādhus* with the body, heeding their instructions and having faith in them with the mind, and glorifying them and preaching their message with one's words. Their example must be followed with body, mind and words, and *bhajana* must be performed according to their instructions. This is the superior form of *sat-saṅga*; merely going to meet them or being in their presence is not an excellent way to associate.

After attaining *bhakti* one must associate with the saints in order to relish *rasa*. In *Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* (1.2.91), Śrīmat Rūpa Gosvāmī has written:

*sajātīyāśaye snigdhe sādhanau saṅgaḥ svato vare
śrīmad bhāgavatārthānām āsvādo rasikair saha*

“One should relish the meaning of *Śrīmad Bhāgavata* with *rasika* devotees who are like-minded, saintly and more advanced than oneself.”

Because there are different kinds of *bhakti-sādhana*, the *sādhaka* should associate with devotees who aspire for the same kind of *bhajana*. These devotees must be more advanced and realised than oneself and must be saintly in the sense that they are very merciful and tender by nature. Just as through the adjective *sajātīyāśaya* it is shown that by associating with such *sādhū-bhaktas* one can nicely relish *bhakti-rasa*, similarly through the adjective *svato vara* it is shown that in the company of such *mahā-bhāgavatas*, *bhakti-rasa* is awakened. In other words, by seeing and touching such great souls and by conversing with them about the Lord, the *rati* within the heart of the *sādhaka* swiftly culminates into *rasa* and this makes everything relishable.

THE GLORIES OF SERVING THE BHAKTAS

All the *śāstras* and *mahājāna-vāṇīs* loudly proclaim with the tumultuous sounds of the Dundubhī-drum the glories of serving the *bhaktas*. In *Śrīmad Bhāgavata* (3.7.19), Śrī Vidura Mahāśaya tells Śrī Maitreya Muni:

*yat sevayā bhagavataḥ kūṭasthasya madhudviṣaḥ
ratir āso bhavet tīvraḥ pādayor vyasanārdanaḥ*

“O Muni! By serving all these devotees of the Lord, deep love for Lord Śrī Madhusūdana, Who is immutable and Who destroys the miseries of material existence, is brought about.”

Śrīmat Jīva Gosvāmīpāda has written in his commentary on this verse in *Bhakti Sandarbha* (244): *tīvra iti viśeṣaṇam prasāṅga mātrāt paricaryāyām viśiṣṭam phalaṁ dyotayati* – “Service is of two kinds - *paricaryā* and *prasāṅga*. Giving monetary donations or eatables to the saints or massaging their feet is called *paricaryā-sevā* and making them hear the topics or the holy names of Śrī Hari is called *prasāṅga-sevā*. Of the two, *paricaryā-sevā* is again shown to be the more glorious one. As a result of this, one swiftly becomes qualified to receive the treasure of love of God. Śrī Bhagavān Himself told Śrī Uddhava: *mad bhakta pūjābhyaḍhikā* – “I am more pleased by a devotee who worships My devotee than by a devotee who worships Me directly.” A person who serves the Vaiṣṇavas should take care that he sees the Vaiṣṇavas as Śrī Viṣṇu Himself! Even if a Vaiṣṇava is low born or ill-behaved, he should be duly served, respected and bowed down to. If any kind of disrespect is shown to a Vaiṣṇava who wears the signs of God, it will be an offence. When the Vaiṣṇavas are served, it must be done to all Vaiṣṇavas, regardless of caste, birth or behaviour, but association must only be had with the genuine *bhaktas*

who are pure in conduct (*sadācārī*). It is not relishable to associate with ill behaved or impure *bhaktas* – this is the verdict of the *śāstras*.

In *Śrīmad Bhāgavata*, Lord Śrī Rṣabhadeva instructs His sons as follows: *mahat sevām dvāram āhur vimuktes tamo-dvāram yoṣitām saṅgi saṅgam* (*Bhāg.* 5.5.2) – “The gateway to liberation or *prema-bhakti* is the service of the great saints and the company of men attached to women is the gateway to hell.” In the *Padma Purāṇa* it is seen:

*ārāadhanānām sarveṣām viṣṇor ārādhanam param
tasmāt parataram devi tadīyānām samarcanam*

Śrīmān Mahādeva said: “O Devi! Of the worship of all gods and goddesses, the worship of Viṣṇu is the greatest, and even greater than that is the worship of the Vaiṣṇavas!” In order to please Śrī Viṣṇu, the Vaiṣṇavas must always be satisfied – *tasmād viṣṇu prasādāya vaiṣṇavān paritoṣayet* (*Itihāsa Samuccaya*). In *Śrī Caitanya Bhāgavata*, it is described:

*kṛṣṇa sevā hoite-o vaiṣṇava sevā boḍo
bhāgavata ādi sab śāstre koilo doḍo
eteke vaiṣṇava sevā parama upāya
bhakta sevā hoite sabāi kṛṣṇa pāya
kṛṣṇa bhajibāra yāra āche abhilāṣa
se bhajuk kṛṣṇera maṅgala nija dāsa
sabāre śikhāya gauracandra bhagavāne
vaiṣṇavera sevā prabhu koriyā āpane*

“*Śrīmad Bhāgavata* and other scriptures firmly proclaim that the service of the Vaiṣṇavas is even greater than the service of Kṛṣṇa. Thus the service of the Vaiṣṇavas is the greatest means for everyone to attain Kṛṣṇa. Those who desire to worship Kṛṣṇa should worship Kṛṣṇa’s own auspicious devotee. Gauracandra

Bhagavān has taught this to everyone by personally engaging in the service of the Vaiṣṇavas.”

Svayaṁ Bhagavān Śrīman Mahāprabhu showed all the people of the world how nice it is to serve the devotees by giving a personal example. Therefore, anyone who desires *bhakti* must certainly engage in the service of the *bhaktas*. Śrīla Vṛndāvana dāsa described Mahāprabhu's service of the *bhaktas* as follows:

*nināḍaye vastra kāro koriyā yatane
dhuti vastra tuli kāro den to āpane
kuśa, gaṅgā mṛttikā kāhāro den kore
sāji bohī kon dīna cole kāro ghare
sakala vaiṣṇava-gaṇa 'hāy hāy' kore
'ki koro ki koro'! tabu kore viśvambhare*

“He carefully wrung out the wet garments of one *bhakta* and handed him a dry *dhuti*, he handed Kuśa grass and clay from the Gaṅgā to another, and one day he went to the house of one *bhakta* carrying a tray for worship. All the Vaiṣṇavas exclaimed, ‘Alas, alas! What are You doing?’, but still Viśvambhara would do these things.”

The Lord also revealed for which reason He was serving His own devotees:

*tomarā se pāro kṛṣṇa bhajana divāre
dāsere sevile kṛṣṇa anugraha kore
tomā sabā sevile se kṛṣṇa bhakti pāi etc.*

“You can bestow Kṛṣṇa-*bhajana* – when I serve His servants, Kṛṣṇa will bestow His mercy upon Me. When I serve you all I will get Kṛṣṇa-*bhakti*.”

In his book *Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* (1.2.219), Śrīmat Rūpa Gosvāmīpāda has written:

*yāvanti bhagavad bhakter aṅgāni kathitānīha
prāyas tāvanti tad bhakta bhakter api budhā viduḥ*

“Each item of devotion to the Lord that has been described here is exceeded by the corresponding item of devotion to His devotees. The wise men understand this.”

Here one may ask: “How will the service of the Vaiṣṇavas that the scriptures and the *mahājānas* are promulgating be accomplished? After all, it is the Lord who is worshipped through the process of hearing, chanting etc. How can the worship of the Vaiṣṇavas also be considered a limb of *bhakti*?” To answer this question, the Gosvāmīs have said, “All the items of the Lord’s *bhajana* that have been mentioned, such as hearing, chanting and remembering are exceeded by their corresponding items of worship of the Vaiṣṇavas. That means one must hear and chant the glories of the Vaiṣṇavas, offer them formal worship and praises, see them, offer obeisances unto them, circumambulate them and pray to them with the greatest devotion, because devotion to the Vaiṣṇavas is nondifferent from devotion to Kṛṣṇa. The *Śrī Nārada Pañcarātra* says: *vaiṣṇavānām parābhaktiḥ* – “One must be most devoted to the Vaiṣṇavas.”



ŚRĪ ANANTA DĀSA BĀBĀJĪ MAHĀRĀJA is a leading exponent of the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava tradition in the modern age. Having mastered the scriptures in the course of his studies spanning over half a century, his comprehensive and authentic commentaries illuminate the genuine teachings of

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